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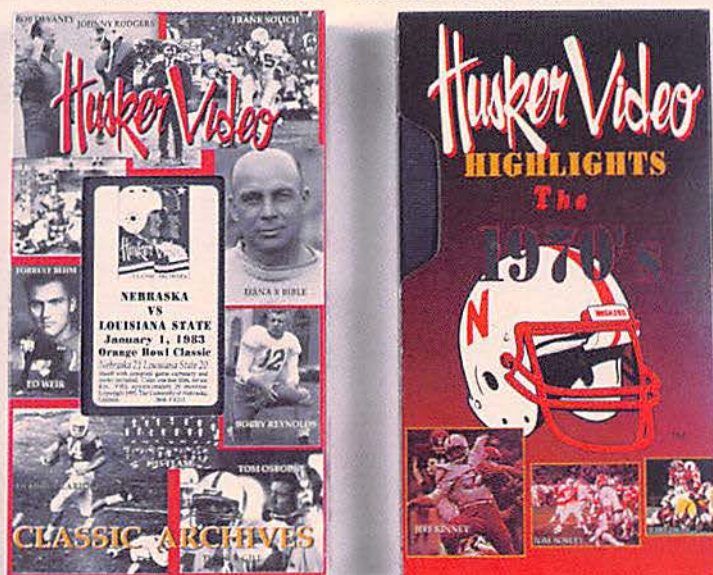
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CONTENTS

February 1997 • Volume 17, No. 2

FEATURES

10 Heart Attack

The Huskers came up a game short of winning a second-straight national title, but proved they were able to turn adversity around.

26 Best & Worst Of 1996

So Nebraska didn't win a third consecutive national championship. That isn't reason to dismiss the 1996 season with a wave of the hand or just toss it aside like an Iowa State tackler. Is it?

38 Inexact Science

As following the recruiting race gets more popular, the actual job of recruiting continues to get more complicated.

By Mike Babcock

44 Youth Gone Wild

Angela Beck's squad jumped out to a school record setting mark of 9-0 behind the play of Brooke Schwartz and her freshman class.

18

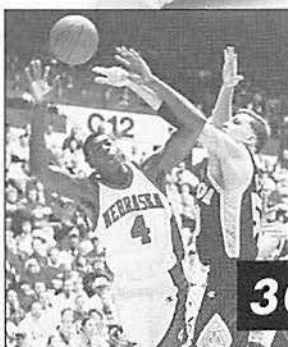


DEPARTMENTS

Letters	6
Adrian Analysis	7
State of the Huskers	8
The Jet's Perspective	14
Overview	16
Orange Bowl Review	18
Orange Bowl Statistics	25
Men's Hoops	30
Big 12 Hoop Standings	33
Grid Recruiting	34



10



30



38



44

ON THE COVER

Damon Benning (J.C. Ridley)
Mikkie Moore (Jon Waller)

NEXT ISSUE

It's that time of year. Your Nebraska football recruiting wrap issue will be mailed Feb. 17 and will include the most in-depth capsules available on each of the players signed.

FromTheEDITOR

The last thing most high school kids want is another book. Lockers across the nation are full of tomes that never see the light of day, let alone get into the bedroom. Sometimes you've got to wonder how "book reports" would ever be written if it wasn't for the neighborhood Blockbuster Video store.

But if your child has any ambition of playing sports on the collegiate level, you can't afford not to get them a copy of *The Recruiting Struggle*, written by Lee Caryer. And as far as I've seen, it's not available under the "new release" section next to *Eraser* and *The Cable Guy*.

The former editor of *Midwest Basketball News* (a newsletter that highlighted the best prep talent each season), Caryer has compiled his years of dealing with the college recruiting experience into a 274 page handbook.

Dealing with every — and sometimes nasty — detail of college recruiting, this handbook traces the stories of athletes who endured and survived all the phone calls, visits and sales tactics. First-hand accounts of what happened guide parents, guardians and student/athletes through each phase of the process. Much like buying a car, knowing what you're looking for and what you're willing to do to get it before you walk on the lot puts you in better command of the situation. This, as many testimonials in the book concur, is the best advice any recruit can have.

Caryer's book would also be of interest to the coaches who do the recruiting. What coach wouldn't like to know what works and doesn't when pursuing top-flight talent? Many players and their parents talk about the coaches who impressed them and those who didn't and why. Ohio State found the information so valuable it bought 75 copies to give to each of its coaches.

While many of the stories and information pertain to football, there are chapters relating to basketball (both men's and women's), non-revenue sports and women's athletics in general. Caryer's "Executive Summary" chapter, which lists 40 key issues each student/athlete should address, will probably be photocopied and placed on the refrigerators of many homes.

Caryer gets many of college sports' most prominent coaches, including Al McGuire, John Wooden and Bo Schembechler, to talk about what a student/athlete should expect during the process and how they can be fully prepared for one of the most difficult decisions of their lives.

Though much of the information is just that, there is enough humor to keep even the lightest reader enticed. Among the more amusing stories involved Schembechler. While head football coach at Michigan he said, "If my son wanted to play football, I'd have him drive to East Lansing and see a movie, drive to South Bend to see a movie and drive to Columbus to see a movie. When recruiters called he could say, 'I've already been to East Lansing, South Bend and Columbus.' Immediately they (college coaches) would want him because everyone else does."

The only knock I had with the book was that I didn't see enough on the pitfalls that all too often accompany the recruiting process. Caryer points out that only one percent of the seniors eligible for a college scholarship in football each year actually receive free rides. What about the other 99 percent that built up their hopes (sometimes as the book suggests, fueled by promises made during the heat of battle) only to be left scholarship-less on signing day?

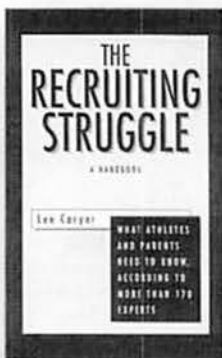
For those of you who don't have children, but are still rabid about college recruiting (and judging from our recruiting calls at the office there are plenty of you out there) this is an entertaining piece that pulls you deeper into your obsession.

Former NFL head coach Chuck Knox once said, "Pressure is something you feel only when you don't know what the hell you are doing." Caryer helps alleviate some of that pressure with *The Recruiting Struggle*.

Chris Greer
Editor



To purchase *The Recruiting Struggle*, send \$18.95 per book to Caryer Enterprises, RS-HI, 975 Atlantic Ave., Ste. 676, Columbus, OH, 43229. To avoid shipping charges, simply mention where you heard about the book. If you wish a personalized autograph for an athlete, briefly identify the boy or girl.

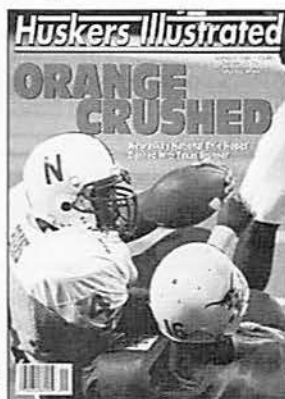


LETTERS

Mike Babcock was right on the money when he predicted that the squad would rebound from the trouncing, courtesy of Texas ("Osborne's Teams Have Battled Back Before" — January 1997). By the way, what happened against Penn State, Longhorns? But I digress.

The Huskers looked as sharp as they have all season against Virginia Tech. Damon Benning was outstanding and Scott Frost even better. The offense executed and the Black Shirts shut down one of the best passing teams in the country. It also helped that the Tech receivers couldn't hold onto the ball.

Cambell York
Rochester, N.Y.



While it would be easy to vote for soccer coach John Walker, I think that Terry Pettit should be the Cornhusker coach of the year. Pettit managed to take a team that lost three all-Americans and one of its best returners to the Final Four of the NCAA Volleyball tournament. That's coaching folks. This year's squad could easily have fallen apart with the lack of leadership on the court, but it didn't. Injuries caused numerous headaches, yet the team persevered.

Thomas Walker
Norfolk, Neb.

Scott Frost still can't throw the ball very well, but I think he's a keeper. But maybe next year Tom Osborne can convert him to running back.

Paul Paskula
St. Louis, Mo.

Please send your comments and questions to **Letters**, P.O. Box 83222, Lincoln, Neb. 68501. Or fax them to us at (972) 851-1720. We reserve the right to edit the letters for clarity, content and length.

For those with electronic mail abilities, huskersedit@xcscx.com.

Up To The Challenge

To the Huskers' credit, they were able to react well to a situation that could have been a serious motivational problem

As the Orange Bowl, sun country-bound, DC-10 charter lifted off the runway at the Lincoln Municipal Airport, I settled back in my seat — after double-checking to see that my tray table was up and my seat was in a locked, upright position.

Plane rides for me are . . . put it this way, you've heard about putting 10 pounds of dirt in a five-pound bag or something like that? Well, that's about how I fit into airplane seats. So to characterize my ride as settling back is a misnomer. But what it does do is keep me awake, so my ride to Miami was a three-hour journey of reading and reflecting (more reflecting) about the Orange Bowl and what was ahead.

It would be the first Orange Bowl that would not be played in the Orange Bowl stadium. The old rust bucket (actually a term of endearment) in Miami had unfortunately seen its day and would now give way to Pro Player Stadium, formerly known as Joe Robbie Stadium.

As a kid growing up in Brainard, Neb., and then south Omaha, I always watched the Orange Bowl and the "granddaddy of them all," the Rose Bowl. It was my express hope to someday play in one of them.

I watched Nebraska beat Auburn in the 1964 Orange Bowl and thought that one day my wish would come true since I was being recruited by, and would sign, with Nebraska. Well, my freshman year, the varsity (remember that out-dated term?) went to the Orange Bowl and lost to Alabama 39-28. It was the game where Frank Solich, Nebraska assistant head coach and running backs coach, set the still-standing Orange Bowl record for return yards with 130. But the next year, we went to the Sugar bowl, and I never realized my goal of playing in the Orange Bowl. The next best thing

would be to broadcast the game, and fortunately, that happened. I had a part of history in the first game at Pro Player Stadium.



**By
ADRIAN
FIALA**

The great games of Orange Bowl history, especially the 1970's where the Huskers claimed national championships in 1970 and 1971, also stand out. We all remember quarterback Jerry Tagge, my broadcast buddy, stretching across the goal line to clinch a 17-12 victory over LSU in the 1971 Orange Bowl game. And the 1972 game, in which the Huskers sewed up a sec-

The usual throng of Husker faithful stayed away from the Pro Player Stadium.



ond national championship with a 38-6 victory over Bear Bryant and Alabama. Johnny Rodgers had a 72-yard punt return and played perhaps his finest collegiate game the following year in the Huskers' 40-6 rout of Notre Dame.

I wondered as we headed south if this game, this week, in this new state-of-the-art stadium, would etch another piece of Orange Bowl history in our minds. Little did I realize that, yes, it would . . . but not in the way I expected, not in the way that any of us wanted or anticipated.

After unusually heavy practices, the Huskers overcame some serious attitude problems and found the

right levers to pull. The last three days of preparation, it all came together for the Huskers. Virginia Tech had an excellent team, with a strong, solid, attacking defense and an offense with a big, strong quarterback who could throw the ball as well as anyone at this level.

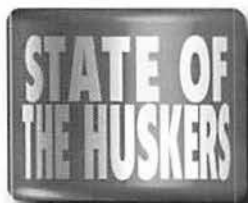
Even in the early-going, when Tech scored first, I didn't have a great deal of concern. The Huskers traded pass for pass, score for score until late in the third quarter and then pulled away for a 41-21 victory. The first impression I had after the game was that this was certainly a building block for 1997 and that next year's offense will step up once again to its customary level.

As I reflect on the first FedEx Orange Bowl game at Pro Player Stadium, however, the one thing I

will remember most, unfortunately, is the inescapable, vast hue of orange emanating from the empty seats. The smallest crowd in 50 years attended the game — 51,212, about 24,000 short of capacity.

You will be hard-pressed in next year's Orange Bowl game to find empty seats because it will match the Bowl Alliance's No. 1 and No. 2 picks. As I told Orange Bowl Executive Director Keith Tribble, our halftime guest, we aim to see him next year, along with the greatest football fans in the nation.

The color he will see in those orange seats for the 1998 game will be red. ■



Fox On The Run

Like Devaney and Osborne, the retiring Don "Fat Fox" Bryant is a Cornhusker institution, a living legend and a treasure

H

e is The Fat Fox, a nickname so familiar that it might be on his driver's license for all anyone knows. It certainly needn't be set off with quotation marks, any more than his given name would

be.

Don Bryant has been The Fox since, well . . . since a track and field meet when he was competing in the red and black of Lincoln High. There is a story associated with the name, of course.

With The Fat Fox, there's always a story — always a good story. But he claims the one about the nickname is too involved to recount here. So you'll have to imagine the particulars.

Fat was added to The Fox by Norrie Anderson, probably in the early 1950s.

The basis of Anderson's addition is slightly more obvious. By the early 1950s, The Fox had become slightly more portly than when he had competed in the track meet for the Links.

Anderson, like Bryant, is something of a legendary figure, dating from a time when sports writers often were as colorful as the athletes and coaches about whom they wrote.

Anderson met Bryant in 1948, in a Spanish class at Nebraska. They were what now are known as "non-traditional" students. They were World War II veterans, resuming their formal education (as distinguished from the informal education Bryant got on active duty in the United States Marine Corps).

Anderson was the sports editor of the *Lincoln Star*. Bryant was a lineman on the Cornhusker freshman football team. He had dreams of

becoming an All-American lineman, despite certain limitations which Anderson, with his sports writer's eye, noticed and was only too willing to point out.

He was too small, too short and too slow, Anderson told him.

"Norrie had my football ability pretty well scouted," Bryant said.

There might have been an element of self-interest in Anderson's assessment. He was shrewd enough, and practical enough, to know that if Bryant gave up football, he would need something to occupy his spare time. And, it just so happened, Anderson needed part-time help at the newspaper.

So Bryant's career in athletics ended, and also began, in a modest way.

The part-time job for which Anderson hired him in 1948 turned into a distinguished career, first as one who reported on Nebraska athletics and then as one who facilitated that reporting.

In 1954, Bryant succeeded Anderson as sports editor of *The*

Bryant maintains the comment that led to his ejection was innocuous, which it probably was. The words and actions of The Fat Fox have always been characterized by good humor, never malice.

In 1963, Bryant replaced John Bentley as Nebraska's sports information director. Bentley, the university's first full-time sports information director, "showed me where the print shop was. He showed me a file cabinet and a desk. Then he left for the golf course," Bryant once recalled.

Bryant shared office space in the Coliseum with baseball coach Tony Sharpe and wrestling coach Bob Mancuso. His job became publicizing the Cornhusker teams about which he had reported.

Among the things on which he had reported was the arrival of football coach Bob Devaney from Wyoming the year before. Over the next 10 years, Bryant helped reporters who chronicled Devaney's considerable accomplishments. He became James Boswell to Devaney's Samuel Johnson.

He was well-connected. A phone call to a friend such as Dan Jenkins at *Sports Illustrated* or Gordon White at the *New York Times* could solidify a Cornhusker's All-America candidacy. A sports information director's most important job was to network. And none networked better than The Fox.

He was a goodwill ambassador, for the state as well as for its university's athletic department.

Big Eight Conference sports information directors were well-known at newspapers, radio stations and television stations across the country. They included Oklahoma's Johnny Keith and Missouri's Bill Callahan. But none was better known, or more popular, than Nebraska's Fat Fox.

Bryant served as Cornhusker sports information director for 31



**By
MIKE
BABCOCK**



Bryant has been to every Cornhusker bowl game except the 1941 Rose Bowl.

Lincoln Star, a position he held until 1963. He was named Nebraska's "Sports Writer of the Year" twice — or once more than the number of times he was ejected from the Coliseum by an official during a Cornhusker basketball game.

years. He was an assistant athletic director for 21 years, and he has been Nebraska's Associate Athletic Director for Public Relations since 1993, the year he retired from his duties as sports information director.

His awards and accomplishments would fill an entire issue of *Huskers Illustrated*. He served as a media liaison at the Olympic Games in Lake Placid, Sarajevo and Calgary. He served on the Media Services Staff for the NCAA men's basketball tournament Final Four for 20 years.

He was a familiar figure, seated beneath a basket, at the championship game.

He has been inducted into the Nebraska Journalism Hall of Fame, the Husker Track and Field Officials Hall of Fame and the College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA) Hall of Fame, and he has received special merit awards from the Nebraska Football and Basketball Halls of Fame.

He is past president of CoSIDA and has received the Arch Ward Memorial Award for outstanding service to the profession. The Nebraskaland Foundation has presented him its Wagonmaster Award, and the Nebraska Alumni Association has presented him its Distinguished Achievement Award.

Bryant's remarkable career might best be expressed in another way, however. He has attended 262 consecutive Cornhusker football games at Memorial Stadium. Counting the Orange Bowl game against Virginia Tech, he has attended 494 of the last 498 Nebraska football games overall. That means The Fat Fox has attended nearly half (47.5 percent) of all the Nebraska football games ever played.

He has been to every Cornhusker bowl game except one, the 1941 Rose Bowl.

Bryant will continue to add to those totals, but not in an official capacity next season. After 35 years of service to the university, he will retire at the end of the 1996-97 academic year.

His retirement is a singular event, signifying the passing of an era.

In Bryant's time, those who now are considered support personnel could become as well-known as those they supported. Bryant never threw a touchdown pass, sank a clutch free throw or ran the anchor on the mile relay for the Cornhuskers.

Nevertheless, Nebraska fans all knew The Fat Fox. ■

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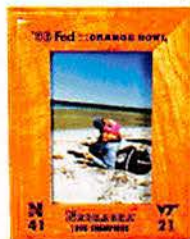
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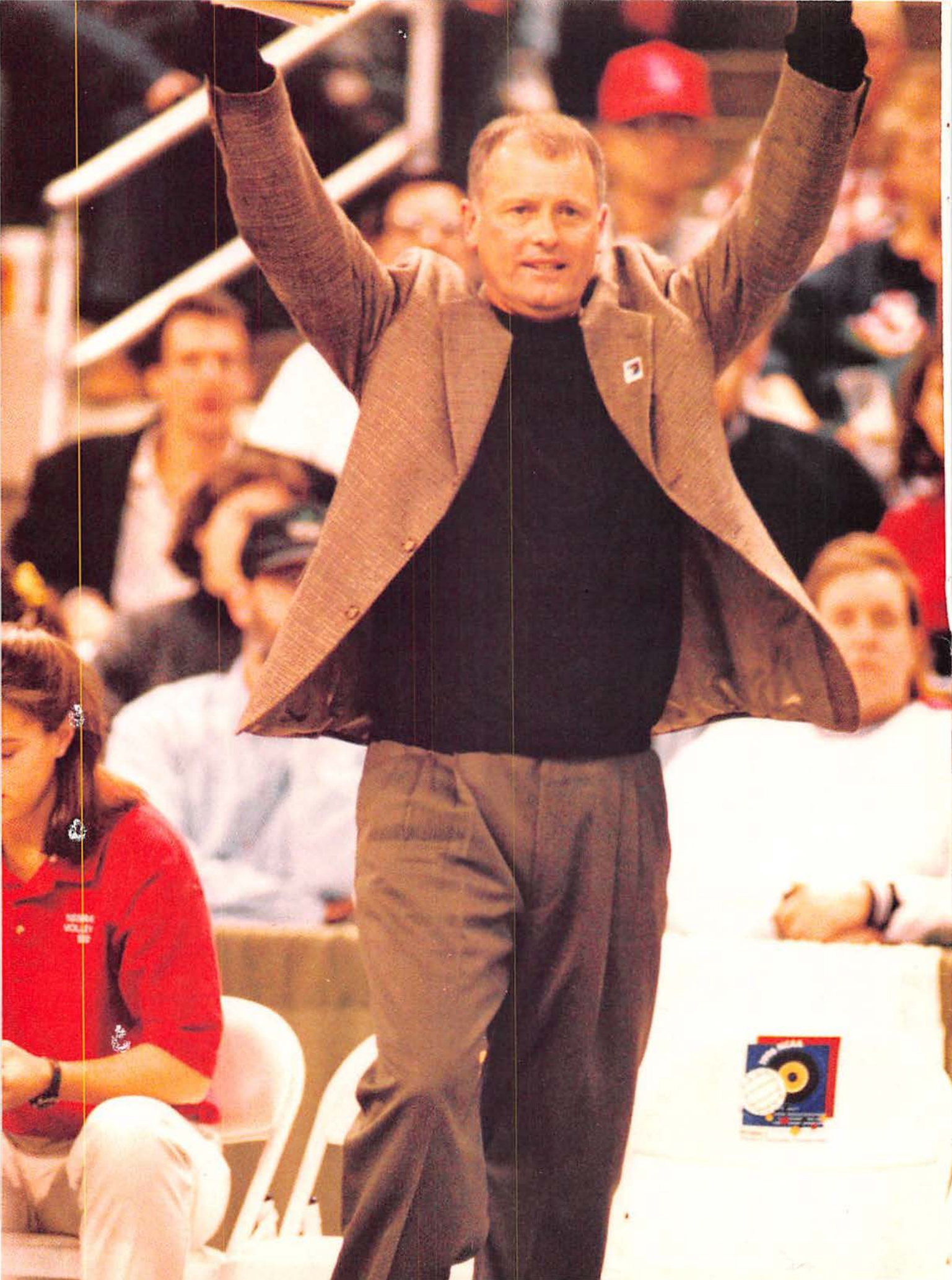
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Heart Attack

The Huskers came up a game short of winning a second-straight national title, but proved they were able to turn adversity around

IN THE MIDDLE of the season, at a time when his team's focus might not have been exactly what it should have been, Nebraska volleyball coach Terry Pettit read aloud from Christy Johnson's journal.

Johnson, a senior All-American setter on the Huskers' 1995 national championship team, kept a season-long journal of her impressions of the experience. Her words were powerful.

"We sat there in awe of what she wrote," sophomore Megan Korver said.

Korver, who is from Adams, Neb., was a freshman at George Washington University last season. She transferred to Nebraska for an opportunity to share in such an experience. Although the Huskers fell two victories short of repeating as national champions, she wasn't disappointed in her decision.

"I feel I'm blessed," Korver said after Nebraska advanced to the NCAA Final Four by defeating Penn State 20-18 in the fifth game of the championship match of the East Regional in Lincoln.

The 1995 Huskers realized their potential. The NCAA title is evidence of that. But the 1996 Huskers might also have played to their potential, despite not having a second trophy as proof.

After Nebraska lost to top-seeded Stanford 3-1 in the semifinals of the NCAA Tournament in Cleveland, Ohio, Pettit said his young team had "left everything on the court," against an opponent that he had described beforehand as, without doubt, the most physically talented team in the country.

Stanford provided a further indication of that in the finals, by sweeping third-seeded Hawaii — which had

swept No. 1-ranked Florida in the other semifinal match. "I've said all along that if this team plays anywhere close to its potential, it can be scary," Stanford coach Don Shaw said.

And the Cardinal played close to its potential in the matches at Cleveland.

The Huskers did not, according to sophomore setter Fiona Nepo. "I thought we played OK," she told Steve Sipple of the *Lincoln Journal Star*. "But we didn't play our best match."

Nebraska didn't play its best match in defeating fifth-seeded Penn State to advance to the Final Four, either. But the dramatic victory at the NU Coliseum epitomized the Huskers' 30-4 season. Pettit described it as "one of the most interesting and amazing matches I've ever been a part of."

The Huskers came back from an 11-5 deficit in the fifth game. They trailed 14-12, with only one point in rally scoring between them and elimination. But they refused to concede that point.

On one "amazing" play that would have given Penn State the match, Pettit said, senior Kate Crnich fisted the ball just before it hit the floor and Lisa Reitsma "hit it right-handed over the net."

"We don't have any drills for any of those moves. They're just spontaneous."

Soon after, more such athletic spontaneity from Korver gave Nebraska the match.

On the next-to-last point, "Fiona, in transition, set her a low ball, and she had the vision to drop below the net and poke it over. Eight weeks ago, she would've hit it into the net," Pettit said.



"On the point prior to that, she (Korver) went up . . . the block was solid . . . and she basically swung so hard, she finished so aggressively, that the ball went right through the block. That's not a move she would have made, say, earlier in the season, either. I think the great thing about Megan and so many of our athletes is, they're coachable. They really take to heart what you tell them."

The Huskers also took to heart what they told themselves, according to Korver. Before the season, Pettit asked each athlete to write something about herself, a goal or perception.

Near the middle of the season, Pettit had assistant coach Cathy Noth print and distribute what the players had written about themselves. "It was a reality check for us," said Korver.

Nebraska far exceeded what most had considered realistic going into the season. The Huskers had lost Johnson, Allison Weston and Billie Winsett to graduation. And before they began preseason practice, they lost Jen McFadden, who was sidelined by a back problem resulting from a herniated disk. A healthy McFadden could have contended for Player of the Year honors, according to Pettit.

McFadden's loss was significant, Pettit reiterated before the team left for the Final Four.

"There's a difference in having two battleships and one battleship," Pettit said, quoting his dad, a coach and military veteran. "If you have two, it's like having 10 compared to one. I think that's the difference because you might do certain things that eliminate the option of one of those (battleships)."

"But you can't eliminate both of them on the same play."

He was talking about Stanford's strength. But the principle applied to his own team as well. A healthy McFadden would have combined with Reitsma to give the Huskers two battleships.

Reitsma, the Big 12 Player of the Year, joined Nepo in earning first-team All-America honors. The 6-foot-4 junior outside hitter from Sanborn, Iowa, also was a first-team All-American last season, along with Johnson and Weston. Reitsma deserved serious consideration as

Stanford attacked Lisa Reitsma in the semifinal game with the intention of making the rest of the Huskers beat them.

the national Player of the Year, along with Stanford's Kerri Walsh and Hawaii's Angelica Ljungquist, according to Pettit.

"I don't think any team rode their player as much as we rode Reitsma during the first half of the season," he said. "For the first third of the season, she was our offensive threat."

Before the season, Nebraska also lost Katie Jahnke, a freshman from West Bend, Wis., expected to contribute immediately, and sophomore Denise Koziol. Jahnke was sidelined by a summer knee injury, and Koziol joined her in rehab, after suffering a knee injury in the Red-White scrimmage.

But such losses never limited Pettit's vision. "I don't naturally think about those things. It's more like, in a 300-yard hurdle race, you've just gotten over a hurdle and all you can see is the next hurdle. You have some idea of where you might want to go," he said at a pre-Final Four news conference. "I've said this a thousand times . . . I never consciously try to put limitations on a team."

"I think you cheat a team when you do. When you say this team can't win a conference, or

we're overmatched, or we can't win a national championship, you're cheating your players. The important thing is not what I think. It's what they believe. The reason they're Big 12 champs, the reason they're going to the Final Four is, they always believed they could do



Without the development of setter Fiona Nepo and Big 12 Newcomer of the Year Megan Korver (below), the Huskers may not have made the Final Four.

that. If I had said: 'We're very young; we're inexperienced,' I might have been the roadblock to prevent them from getting there."

Nepo's development in her first season as a starter was another key to Nebraska's success. Her athletic ability was balanced by personal

resiliency, dramatically displayed in the Penn State match.

She "played great. She lost it. And she came back," said Pettit.

"For a young player, that's very hard to do, very unusual. You have to have very high self-esteem to be able to do that. Usually, you lose it and then the next year you come back. For her to right herself in one evening, I think, shows some remarkable intelligence and will and courage."

Nepo and Reitsma were joined by Korver and Crnich on the All-Big 12 first team. Korver, who also was named the conference Newcomer of the Year, was profuse in her praise of Pettit following the Penn State match. "No matter what he says for me to do, it works," she said.

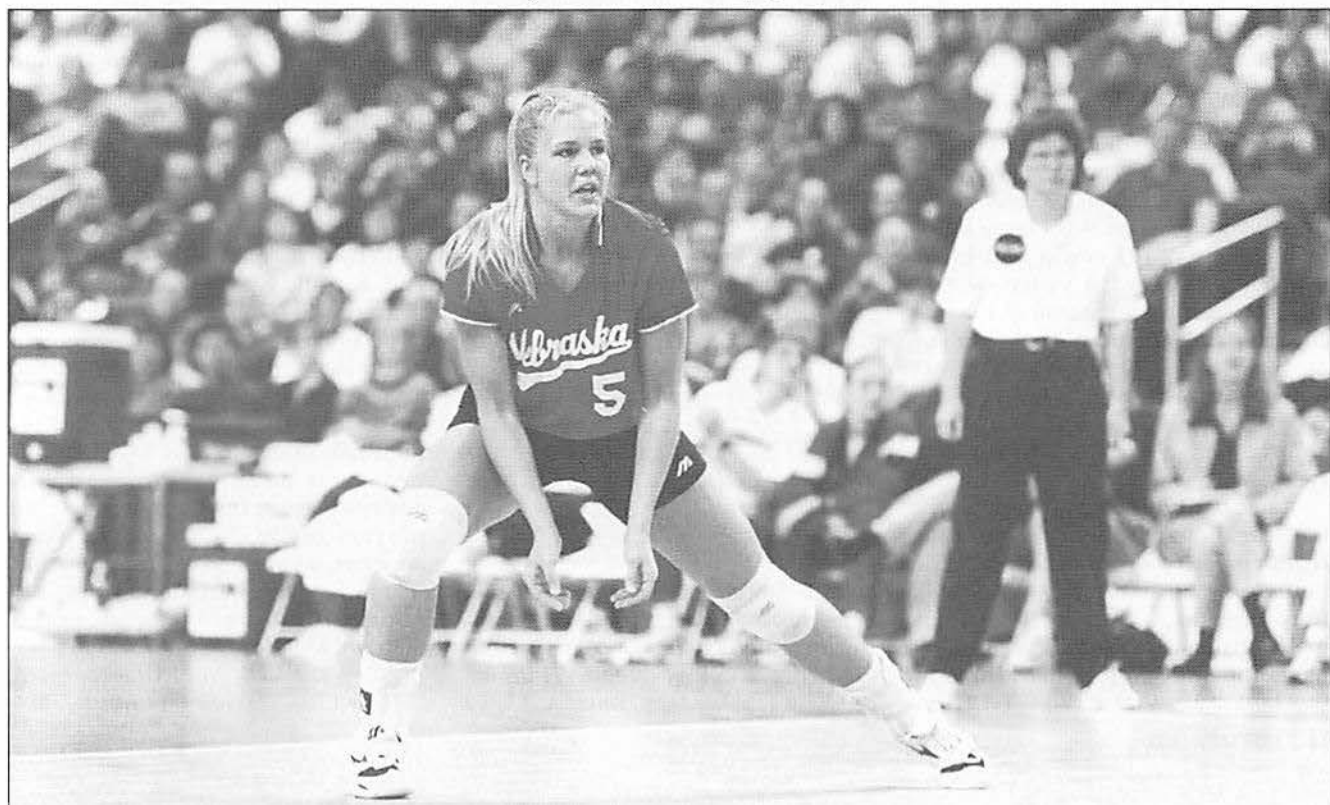
"He has faith in us. He doesn't ask anything of us we can't do."

What Pettit asked of the players from the beginning was commitment, according to Korver. "He wanted us to have passion about the game, about whatever it is we do in life," she said.

Pettit reiterated that by reading from Johnson's journal.

Johnson brought passion to the national championship team. And her words helped to fuel the passion in the 1996 Huskers. They didn't repeat as champions. But they reached that level.

"I think what I'll remember most is this team's ability to take adversity, turn it into a challenge and make some good of it," Pettit said after the season ended in Cleveland. ■



Husker Athletics Are FANTASTIC

Dedication by the people in the stands is what makes athletics more enjoyable in Nebraska

People often ask me what the most memorable moment in my college football career was. Which run or play I thought was the greatest. What highlight gave me the most gratification or what event was the apex of my college career. The question takes many forms, but the meaning is the same. And so is the answer.

They seem to be in disbelief when I tell them what it was like experiencing the energy of the great Husker fans. I can remember vividly standing alone, waiting for the opposing team to punt the ball to me. The whole darn stadium would stand, with electricity and anticipation filling the air, as I waited to receive the ball. Then as the ball was kicked, there would be a stillness in the air.

Everyone would hold their breath so as not to throw off my concentration.

Simultaneously, I could feel the tension in the air, the expectation and the positive energy filling my whole being and then transferring into the power that followed.

People knew something exciting was about to happen.

My concentration would be so intense, it would be as if I were totally focused, as if I could feel Lyell Bremser, the radio voice of the Huskers, calling my name as I headed down the sideline: "Man, woman and child . . . Johnny 'The Jet' Rodgers just left them in the aisles."

I would give the game my best and the rest, as they say, was history.

It has become more apparent over the years how much energy and confidence I drew from the fans. I believe I got as much excitement from the fans as they received from me. My most memorable moments have not come from what I gave to the fans but what I received from

them — confidence.

Over 25 years later, I am still as impressed by the fans as I've always been. We still have sellout crowds at Memorial Stadium every season, as we have had for the past quarter of a century and more. Our fans still follow and support our teams all over the country. As with many former Huskers, I have more autograph signings now than I did 20 years ago. When I am out in public, mothers and fathers are always pointing me out to their children as a player who brought them much joy in their lives.

Because of the great support of Husker fans in Nebraska and all over the country, Husker parapher-

two categories. There are loyal fans and then there are super fans, like Frank Wasinger of Omaha, the head commissary officer at Offutt Air Force Base. A collector of Husker memorabilia for 27 years, Frank has enough to impress anyone, including me.

You can recognize him driving on the streets of Omaha by his license plates, which read: "I Love NU." Frank has more statistical information on me and other Husker players than we have on ourselves.

He has kept track of recordings, statues, bottles and programs going back to the 1920's. He possesses famous players' jerseys, autographed balls from the past 25 years, tickets from Bob Devaney's first game and his last game as well as tickets from Tom Osborne's first game as head coach against UCLA, right up to this year's first-ever Big 12 Conference championship game against Texas.

The most incredible part about Frank is that he is not a season-ticket holder, so he has to hustle to get this material from other die-hard Husker fans like himself. I told him I would personally bring back ticket stubs from this year's Orange Bowl game as well as tickets from the Orange Bowl Hall of Honor, where I was among this year's inductees. Frank says he doesn't know how much his collection is worth, but he plans to have Jerry Tagge come out and give him quotes for insuring it.

With this football season at an end, I would like to say thank you to all of the incredible Husker fans who have maintained their allegiance to Nebraska and its athletic programs. Thank you for standing by us players, with our challenges on and off the field. The character and faithfulness you have exemplified has always been of the highest level. We players really do appreciate your support, as well as your friendship when the games are done. From my family to yours, we wish you a Happy New Year.

Keep the faith in Nebraska. I say: "HUSKER." You say: "POWER." ■

By
**JOHNNY
RODGERS**



Super fans like Frank Wasinger (above) can never get enough of the Huskers or the memorabilia.



alia is among the best-selling collegiate merchandise in the country.

Currently, Nebraska ranks second to Michigan in that category, I think.

Great Husker fans come in at least



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NEB

Orange Bowl Proved To Be Perfect Swan Song

Benning's storied career at Nebraska missed a few chapters, but had a fairy tale ending

By MIKE BABCOCK

Damon Benning stepped down from the podium after answering reporters' questions, following Nebraska's 41-21 victory over Virginia Tech in the Orange Bowl game on New Year's Eve.

Before leaving the small room beneath the stands at Pro Player Stadium, he was presented a trophy for being chosen in a vote of the news media as the Cornhuskers' most valuable player in the game.

Then he was asked to pose for pictures with Obie, the Orange Bowl mascot.

Scott Frost, who followed Benning on the podium, looked down on the scene.

"Now we've got a guy up here who's taller than the 'orange,'" he said with a smile.

Frost not only is 6-foot-3, he also had the advantage of the podium. Benning is 5-foot-11, or about the height of the person dressed as Obie the orange — that is, if you count Obie's crown.

"Obie? Who came up with that?" Benning said, drawing a laugh from those assembled.

Someone explained that "Obie" was for O.B., the initials of Orange Bowl.

Benning laughed at himself. "I'm a little slow sometimes," he said.

The senior I-back from Omaha hadn't been slow earlier in the evening. Virginia Tech's defense had considerable difficulty keeping up with him as he made the most of his last game at Nebraska. He stepped up as the starter and responded with 95 yards and two touchdowns on only 15 carries.

"He's had some ups and downs, right along with the rest of us this year," Frost said.

From a personal standpoint, the downs might have out-numbered the ups for Benning, a co-captain. But he had no complaints about the conclusion to his Cornhusker career. It was fitting.

"It was the ending I wanted," he

said. "We skipped a few chapters in between. But the ending is good. I'm satisfied. I'm happy for my team and for the program." The Orange Bowl victory was especially important to the players who will return next season because of "how the media perceives them."

The young players would do well to follow Benning's example. Like every scholarship recruit, and walk-ons too, he came to Nebraska with great expectations. Though he accomplished a lot, contributing on special teams as well as playing I-back, he started only six games, counting the Orange Bowl.

He battled injuries, including a hamstring pull and an ankle sprain last season, and always faced stiff competition at I-back. He never backed down from the challenge, however. He was a survivor.

"There were some times when I could have been bitter. There are actually some times when I was bitter," he said. "But as I matured and as I grew, I found a way to adjust and channel some of the negative energy. That helped. A lot of it just comes with age, and I tried to talk to the younger guys about not waiting for their opportunity to come, to try to make the most of it and create opportunities."

Benning's opportunity to start the Orange Bowl game came as a result of injuries to sophomore Ahman Green and freshman DeAngelo Evans. Green was recovering from a stress fracture in his left foot and was limited in what he could do in practices leading up to the game. It wasn't until the day before that he felt healthy enough to play. Evans was hampered by a severe, late-season groin injury.

Nebraska went into the game with only Benning and junior Jay Sims completely healthy. Sims, who was first off the bench, carried eight times for 48 yards. And Green carried seven times for 52 yards. Evans probably could have played some in

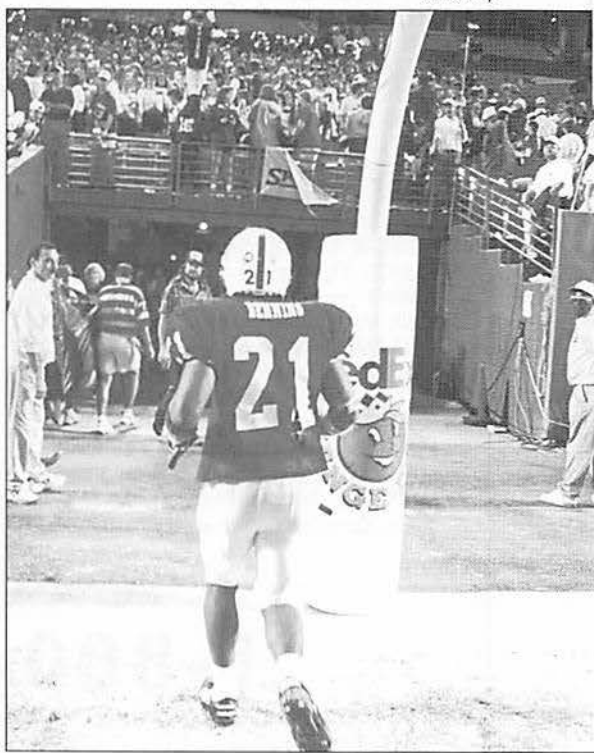
an emergency, according to Osborne, but didn't.

Benning followed Osborne on the podium in the interview room. After stepping down and before exiting the room, Osborne stopped and hugged Benning, an emotional exchange that characterized not only Osborne's affection for Benning but also for his 24th Cornhusker team.

There was similar affection in

Benning earned Nebraska MVP honors in his final game as a Husker at the Orange Bowl.

J.C. Ridley



Benning's words. Before the game, "as captains, we focused a lot on Coach Osborne because I think that is what this game really boils down to," he said.

"When he talked to the seniors today in individual meetings, you could see the hurt in telling us good-bye, and I think we wanted to go out one last time and lay it on the line for him."

In his five years at Nebraska, Benning never stood taller. ■

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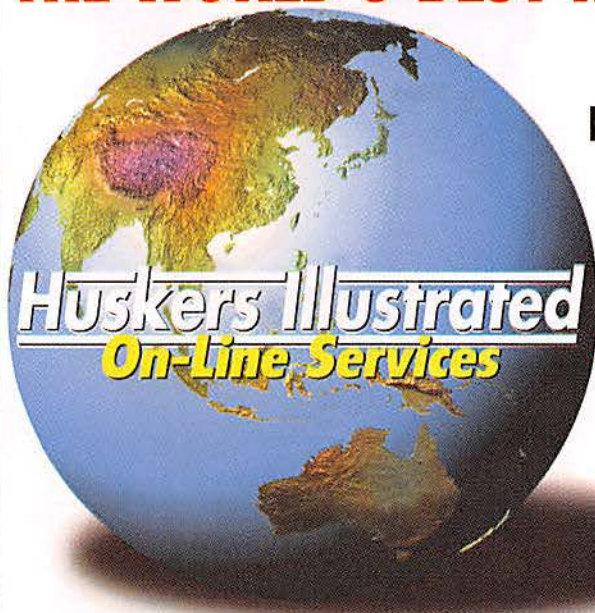
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Hokies No Match For Huskers In Orange Bowl

Bob Devaney took his first Nebraska team to the short-lived Gotham Bowl to cap the 1962 season. The game, played at Yankee Stadium in New York City on a cold and dreary day in mid-December, attracted an audience of 6,166, not counting a few freebies. If anything, the paid total was inflated.

Before the late-morning kickoff, Devaney addressed his players, telling them the situation reminded him of growing up in Saginaw, Mich. "We used to have fights in the back alley," he said. "There wouldn't be anyone watching there either, but pride was still the most important thing in the world."

The Cornhuskers responded by defeating Miami 36-34. The bowl victory was Nebraska's first.

By MIKE BABCOCK "In 1962, you could give that kind of a talk and it would fire your players up," Devaney wrote in his autobiography some 20 years later. In 1996, it still might have worked had Tom Osborne chosen to use such a motivational approach for the FedEx Orange Bowl game against Virginia Tech.

The circumstances, though not nearly as dramatic as those in 1962, were roughly comparable. The Cornhuskers were playing for pride as much as anything. And only a few came to watch the first Orange Bowl game played at Pro Player Stadium, home of the Miami Dolphins and Florida Marlins.

The attendance was 51,212, the lowest for an Orange Bowl game since Jan. 1, 1947.

"Coming out and warming up, it was weird. There was nobody in the stands," said Adam Treu, the Cornhuskers' senior offensive tackle. "We didn't know what was going on."

Players from both teams ran onto the grass field at the 75,000-seat stadium through the west endzone. Those who looked up into the second deck at the east end saw two sections that were nearly empty. What might have been a late-arriving crowd, given the fact that 64,000 tickets had been sold according to Orange Bowl officials, proved to be non-arriving as the clock wound down to kickoff.

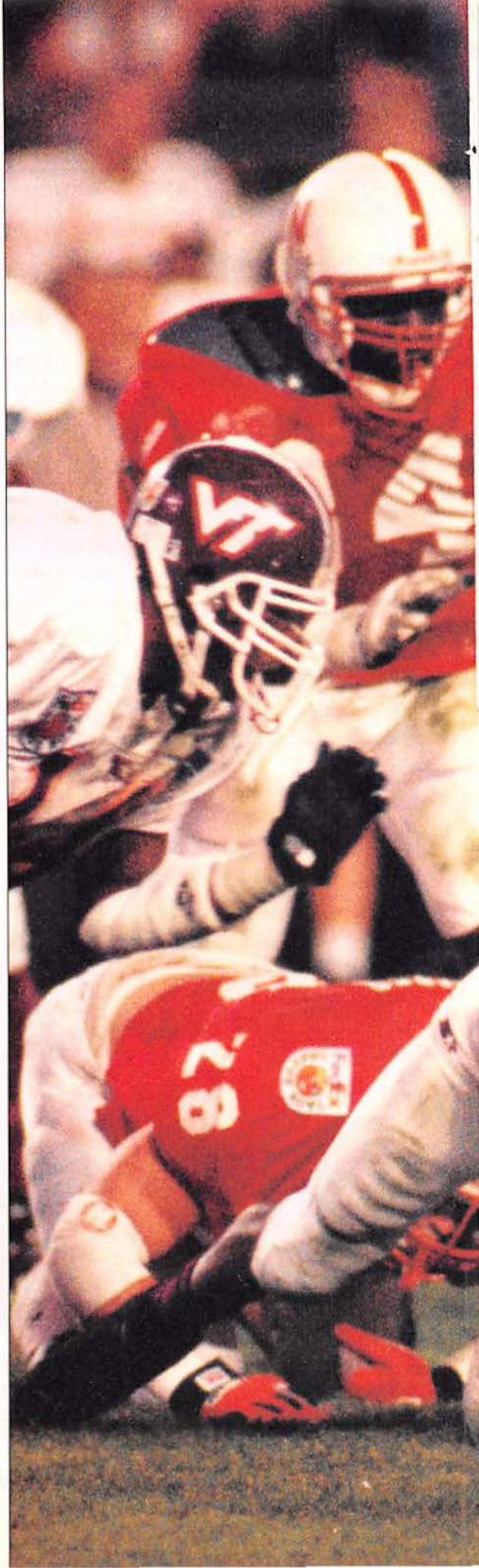
If not for the fans who followed Virginia Tech to Miami for the New Year's Eve game, the actual attendance might not have reached 40,000 — or even 30,000, for that matter. Virginia Tech sold more than 25,000 tickets, and most, if not all of them, were used. In contrast, Nebraska sold approximately half of its mandatory allotment of 15,000 tickets. It had to cover the cost of the other half. The *Omaha World-Herald* estimated that no more than 3,000 in attendance wore Cornhusker red.

"At times, this almost felt like a non-game, in terms of intensity and in terms of interest," coach Tom Osborne said during his post-game news conference. "I was sorry for that."

The handful of Nebraska fans who

Starting for only the second time this season, senior Damon Benning responded with 95 yards and two touchdowns.

Orange Bowl photos by J.C. Ridley





made the trip to south Florida were rewarded for their support with a 41-21 victory. "I've been down here a lot of times in the Orange Bowl and haven't come away with that trophy very often, so I'm really pleased for the opportunity," said Osborne. "Certainly, my thanks go to our coaching staff and our players, who, I thought, really committed themselves."

The Cornhuskers lost two games during a season that had begun with the hope of winning an unprecedented third consecutive national championship. But they never lost their pride.

It wasn't difficult to get motivated to play Top 10 wannabe Virginia Tech, which went into the game ranked No. 9 by *USA Today/CNN* and No. 10 by the Associated Press.

The Black Shirts' relentless pressure on Tech quarterback Jim Druckenmiller resulted in three sacks and a fumble which Jason Peter (55) recovered and took in for a score.

"Not at all," Nebraska I-back Damon Benning said. "Everybody asked if we were going to come to play and how we were going to get motivated for the game. I think it's ridiculous because any time you come from the type of program we come from and you play for the kind of coaches we do, you always come prepared."

"It doesn't matter what the game is. We could have been playing whoever out there and we would have come to play, especially in the Orange Bowl. We wanted to come out here and make amends for what happened in St. Louis," said Benning, the Cornhuskers' MVP (see Overview).

What happened in St. Louis, of course, was the 37-27 loss to Texas that sent Nebraska to the Orange Bowl instead of the Nokia Sugar Bowl and a national championship game against Florida State.

"I was really apprehensive about



how we would react emotionally," said Osborne, who took the Cornhuskers to Miami on Dec. 22 to begin preparing for 10-1 Virginia Tech.

Nebraska's practices were demanding. But "no one was complaining," center Josh Heskew said. The sophomore from Yukon, Okla., got his first start . . . which might explain his enthusiasm.

Benning saw it differently. "You guys wouldn't believe how hard we practiced when we were down here," he said. "We complained a lot at the time, but I felt like I was in great shape."

"Coach (Frank) Solich was really stressing to run the plays out. He wasn't listening a whole lot to the whining and the moaning we were doing during practice, and it paid off."

Osborne approached the game the same way he approached the last three bowl games, with national championships at stake. He emphasized physical conditioning and assured his players that they would be able to wear down Virginia Tech in the second half if they worked hard enough.

He also adjusted the lineup, starting Heskew in a shuffled offensive line. All-American Aaron Taylor, who had started every game at center, moved to left guard, the position he played last season. And Chris Dishman, who had started every game at left guard, moved back to left tackle.

Heskew played every offensive snap until three minutes remained in the game.

"Any time you can keep people in the same spot and get a lot of repetitions, they're going to play better than if they're practicing in two different places," Osborne said of the



changes in the line.

Osborne's assessment was born out. Nebraska gained 415 yards, including 279 rushing even though Ahman Green saw only limited action and DeAngelo Evans didn't play because of a severe groin injury. Green, the team's leading rusher, came off the bench to carry seven times for 52 yards.

Three days before the game, it appeared Green might not play at all because of the stress fracture in his left foot that sidelined him for all of the Texas game and most of the Colorado game.

Benning started at I-back for the second time this season and rushed for 95 yards and two touchdowns. Junior Jay Sims, the second I-back into the game, contributed 48 yards on eight carries.

"The I-backs we had healthy really came through," Osborne said.

Much of the credit for that belonged to the offensive line, which wore down Virginia Tech's defense in the second half. Nebraska scored on its first four second-half possessions.

The Cornhuskers drove 74 yards on nine plays, with Benning covering the final 33 yards on a counter trap. They drove 61 yards on 11 plays, the 11th a 6-yard touchdown run by Benning. They drove 76

yards on 13 plays to set up Kris Brown's second field goal of the game, a 37-yarder. And they drove 55 yards on seven plays, with quarterback Scott Frost capping the game's scoring with a 22-yard touchdown run.

Frost also scored Nebraska's first touchdown, on a 5-yard run early in the second quarter.

The junior from Wood River, Neb., finished with 62 yards rushing and completed 11-of-22 passes for 136 yards, without an interception. The Cornhuskers didn't have any turnovers, in fact.

"I thought Scott played a great ballgame," said Osborne. "He threw the ball well. He ran the option well. You've really got to give a lot of credit to Scott. This was, by quite a bit, his best game."

Virginia Tech's defense was showing signs of fatigue by the end of the first quarter, according to Taylor. The Hokies' defenders "were pretty good size," he said. "But when you've got 310-pounders coming at you, and Damon (Benning), Jay Sims and Ahman (Green) running at you..."

The Cornhuskers might have taken control of the line of scrimmage earlier if they'd had the ball more in the first half. They ran only 27 plays from scrimmage before halftime, compared to 40 for Virginia Tech. The Hokies had the ball for nearly 20 minutes during the first half.

Nebraska's offensive effort impressed defensive coordinator Charlie McBride. "Their defense is good, let me tell you," he said, echoing Osborne. "It was one of our best games offensively."

Virginia Tech nearly matched the Cornhuskers offensively, thanks, primarily, to the passing of quarterback Jim Druckenmiller and the running of tailback Ken Oxendine.

Druckenmiller, a 6-foot-4, 224-pound senior from Northampton, Pa., completed 16-of-33 passes for 214 yards and three touchdowns. "He's going to be playing on Sundays," McBride said.

Oxendine, a 6-foot-1, 221-pound junior from Chester, Va., rushed for 150 yards on 20 carries and caught three passes for 60 yards. The 150 rushing yards were the most against Nebraska this season. Only three other players rushed for more than 100 yards against the Cornhuskers, in fact: Iowa State's Troy Davis (138), Texas's Priest Holmes (120) and Texas Tech's Byron Hanspard (107).

Virginia Tech scored first, on a 19-yard Druckenmiller pass to tailback Marcus Parker late in the first quarter. Nebraska responded with a 25-yard field goal by Brown and Frost's 5-yard touchdown run to take a lead it never relinquished. But the turning point in the game might have been a 31-yard fumble return for a touchdown by defensive tackle Jason Peter that gave the Cornhuskers a 17-7 lead.

Scott Frost put the game out of reach when he scored on a 22-yard run in the final quarter.



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Rush end Mike Rucker caused the fumble by deflecting the ball on a Druckenmiller pitch.

Peter was tempted to high-step into the endzone on his first touchdown but thought better of it. "Jason's only a junior, so I probably would have done something about it," McBride said with a smile.

Virginia Tech countered with Druckenmiller's second touchdown pass to cut the deficit to 17-14 at halftime. And the Hokies came back after Benning's first touchdown run to keep the game's outcome in doubt at 24-21 with 4:58 remaining in the third quarter. But that was the Hokies' last gasp.

Defensively in the second half, "we decided: 'We've got to get this thing done.' We knew we could play better," said McBride. "Both sides were getting tired in the first half, I think... our defense and their offensive line was, too. As time went on, though, it seemed like we got our second wind."

The victory was Osborne's third in 10 Orange Bowl games, and it brought his overall bowl record to 11-13. It also produced his fourth consecutive 11-victory season and gave the Cornhuskers a combined record of 47-3, with the two national championships, over the last four seasons.

In a different context, an 11-2 record and No. 6 national ranking would be regarded as remarkable success. At Nebraska, however, the standard by which seasons are measured has changed.

"When you lose the last two games of a season, it can be bad," Osborne said at a news conference the morning after the Orange Bowl. "We had that happen quite a few times in the past... when that happened, it was like you'd had a bad year. I was sure that would be the case here, too, if we had lost."

After last season's national championship victory, a crowd of some 8,000 came to the Devaney Sports Center to cheer the Cornhuskers. There were fewer than that at the Orange Bowl game.

"Just because it wasn't for the national championship doesn't mean it wasn't a big game," said Benning. "There was kind of a lot riding on this game... more than people thought."

If nothing else, there was the Cornhusker pride on which Devaney drew more than 30 years ago. Some things don't change, even with the passing of time. ■

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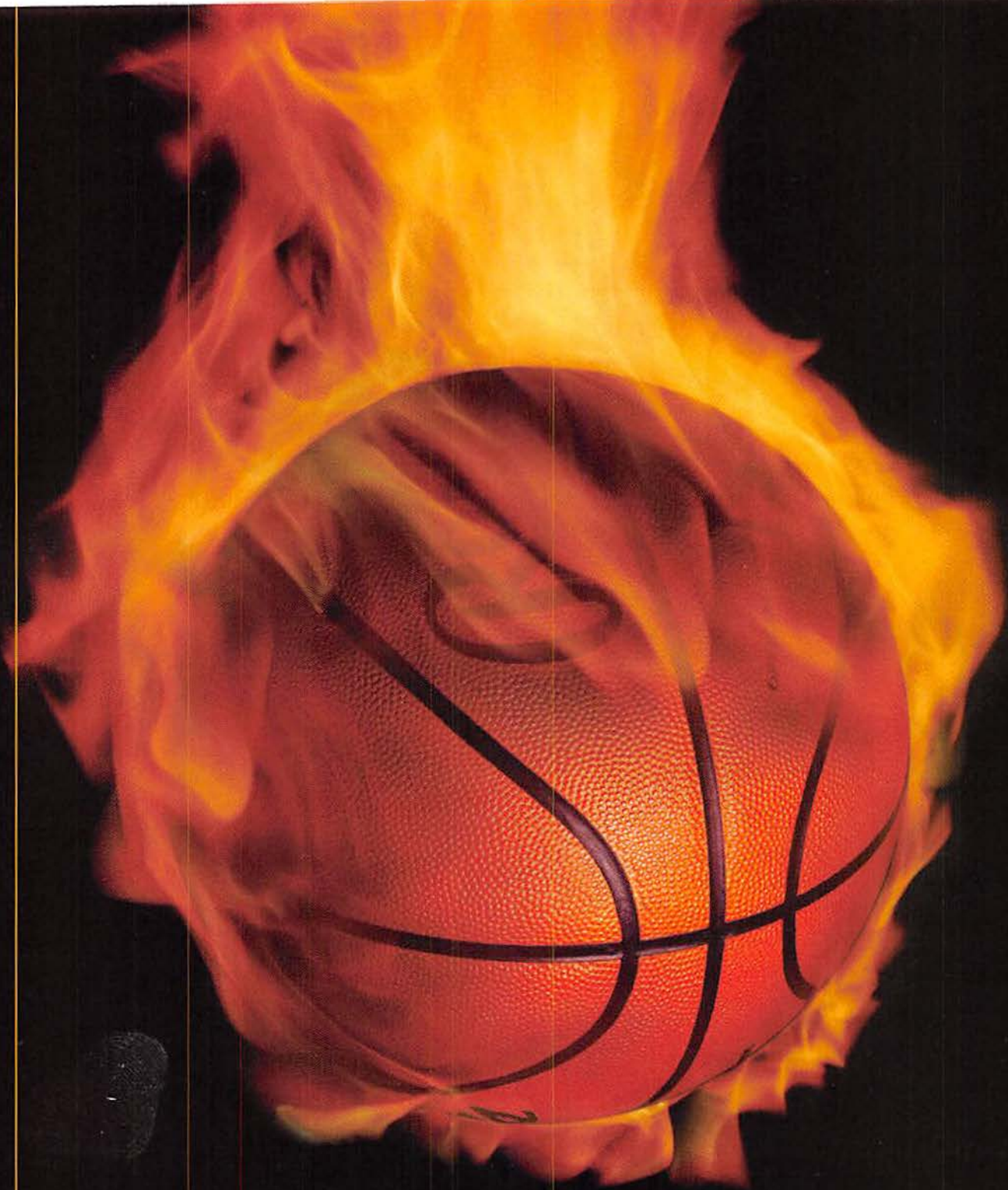


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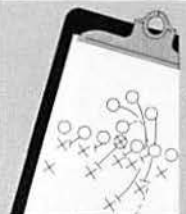
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STATISTICS VS. VIRGINIA TECH

DECEMBER 31, 1996

Pro Player Stadium • Miami, Fla.
Attendance: 51,212



SCORE BY QUARTERS

TEAM	1	2	3	4	Final
NEBRASKA	0	17	14	10	41
VIRGINIA TECH	7	7	7	0	21

TEAM STATS

	VT	NU
First Downs	22	25
Rushing	11	15
Passing	11	8
Penalty	0	2
Rushing Attempts	39	49
Yards Gained Rushing	219	288
Yards Lost Rushing	26	9
Net yards rushing	193	279
Net yards passing	214	136
Passes attempted	33	22
Passes completed	16	11
Had intercepted	0	0
Total plays	72	71
Total net yards	407	415
Avg. gain per play	5.7	5.8
Fumbles-lost	1-1	1-0
Penalties-yards	5-89	3-16
Punts-yards	5-171	2-89
Avg. per punt	34.2	44.5
Possession time	31:02	28:58

DEFENSIVE LEADERS

NEBRASKA	Solo	Asst	TT	Sacks	Int.
Player					
Minter, M.	6	5	11	0	0
Williams, J.	3	6	9	0	0
McFarlin, O.	3	6	9	1.5	0
Ogord, J.	4	1	5	0	0
Wistrom, G.	3	1	4	1	0
Stokes, E.	2	2	4	0	0
Foreman, J.	2	1	3	0	0
Hesse, J.	1	2	3	0	0
Booker, M.	2	0	2	0	0
Peter, J.	1	1	2	0.5	0
Rucker, M.	1	0	1	0	0
Ortiz, T.	1	0	1	0	0
Terwilliger, R.	1	0	1	0	0
Brown, R.	1	0	1	0	0
Kelsay, C.	1	0	1	0	0
Fullman, M.	1	0	1	0	0
Warfield, E.	0	1	1	0	0
Wiltz, J.	0	1	1	0	0
Tomich, J.	0	1	1	0	0
Saltsman, S.	0	1	1	0	0
Johnson, E.	0	1	1	0	0

VIRGINIA TECH

Player	Solo	Asst	TT	Sacks	Int.
Gray, T.	7	5	12	0	0
Hairston, K.	5	1	6	0	0
Newsome, M.	4	2	6	0	0
Prigoleau, P.	4	2	6	0	0
Banks, A.	3	2	5	0	0

INDIVIDUAL LEADERS

RUSHING

NEBRASKA	Att	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
Player					
Benning, D.	15	95	6.3	33	2
Frost, S.	9	62	6.9	22	2
Green, A.	7	52	7.4	22	0
Sims, J.	8	48	6.0	11	0
Makovicka, J.	4	12	3.0	5	0
Turman, M.	2	8	4.0	7	0
Schuster, B.	4	2	0.5	5	0

VIRGINIA TECH

Player	Att	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
Oxendine, K.	20	150	7.5	39	0
Parker, M.	8	22	2.8	7	0
Druckenmiller, J.	9	18	2.0	16	0
Stith, S.	2	3	1.5	2	0

PASSING

NEBRASKA	Cmp-Att-Int	Yds	TD
Player			
Frost	11-22-0	136	0

VIRGINIA TECH

Player	Cmp-Att-Int	Yds	TD
Druckenmiller, J.	16-33-0	214	3

FIELD GOALS

NEBRASKA	Att	Made	Distance
Player			
Brown	2	2	37, 25

VIRGINIA TECH

Player	Att	Made	Distance
None Attempted			

RECEIVING

NEBRASKA	Rec	Yds	APC	Lng	TD
Player					
Wiggins, S.	3	36	12.0	14	0
Lake, J.	2	27	13.5	17	0
Cheatham, K.	1	23	23.0	23	0
Brown, L.	1	23	23.0	23	0
Jackson, S.	1	11	11.0	11	0
Jackson, V.	1	9	9.0	9	0
Holbein, B.	1	5	5.0	5	0
Benning, D.	1	2	2.0	2	0

VIRGINIA TECH

Player	Rec	Yds	APC	Lng	TD
Jennings, B.	4	58	14.5	20	0
Oxendine, K.	3	60	20.0	41	0
Parker, M.	3	28	9.3	19	1
White, C.	2	38	19.0	33	1
Stube, M.	2	23	11.5	14	0
Scales, S.	2	7	3.5	6	1

PUNT RETURNS

NEBRASKA	Att	Yds	Avg	Lng	TD
Player					
Fullman, M.	3	25	8.3	26	0

KICKOFF RETURNS

NEBRASKA	Att	Yds	Avg	Lng	TD
Player					
Cheatham, K.	2	43	21.5	23	0

VIRGINIA TECH

Player	Att	Yds	Avg	Lng	TD
None Attempted					

1996 SEASON STATS

(12 GAMES) Bowl Games Don't Count

RUSHING

Name	G	Att.	Yds.	YPG	Tds.
Green, A.	10	155	917	91.7	7
Evans, D.	11	148	776	70.5	14
Benning, D.	11	85	465	42.3	7
Frost, S.	12	126	438	36.5	9
Sims, J.	11	41	288	32.0	3
Shuster, B.	11	46	213	19.4	1
Turman, M.	9	21	122	13.5	3
Makovicka, J.	10	23	119	11.9	0
Perino, J.	7	5	19	2.7	0
Cobb, J.	8	12	43	5.4	1
Christo, M.	5	3	35	7.0	0
Eicher, C.	1	2	18	18.0	0
Vedra, J.	12	1	11	11.0	0
Kingston, B.	5	9	10	2.0	0
Legate, B.	8	3	8	1.0	0
Olines, J.	3	3	8	2.7	0
Wiggins, S.	11	2	7	0.6	0
London, F.	4	3	6	1.5	0
Raymond, S.	2	1	4	2.0	0
Cheatham, K.	12	1	-16	-1.3	0

PASSING

Name	G	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	Tds.
Frost, S.	12	104-200-3	52.0	1,440	13
Turman, M.	9	9-19-0	47.4	126	1
Perino, J.	7	0-2-0	0.0	0	0

RECEIVING

Name	G	No.	Yds.	YPC	YPG	Tds.
Holbein, B.	12	23	335	14.6	27.9	4
Vedra, J.	12	20	300	15.0	25.0	1
Jackson, V.	12	13	220	16.9	18.3	4
Evans, D.	11	12	75	6.3	6.8	0
Green, A.	10	9	93	10.3	9.3	0
Cheatham, K.	12	7	105	15.0	8.7	1
Brown, L.	11	5	101	20.2	9.2	1
Lake, J.	12	4	101	25.3	8.4	1
Shuster, B.	11	4	83	20.8	7.5	0
Jackson, S.	12	4	48	12.0	4.0	2
Wiggins, S.	11	3	45	15.0	4.1	0
Makovicka, J.	10	3	28	9.3	2.8	0
Wills, A.	9	1	19	19.0	2.1	0
Edwards, J.R.	5	1	10	10.0	2.0	0
Legate, B.	8	1	9	9.0	1.1	0
Wieting, S.	12	1	6	6.0	0.5	0
Benning, D.	11	1	-1	-1.0	-0.1	0

FIELD GOALS

Name	G	Att.	Good	Long
Brown, K.	12	19	12	51

DEFENSE

Name	G	UT	AT	TT	Int.	Sacks
Williams, J.	12	36	61	97	3-49	5-38
Hesse, J.	12	32	53	85	0	2-18
Wistrom, G.	12	30	45	75	1-9	9.5-48
Peter, J.	12	17	41	58	0	4-28
Minter, M.	12	15	36	51	5-129	0
Stokes, E.	12	22	23	45	1-0	0
Foreman, J.	12	10	33	43	2-27	0.5-2
Farley, T.	8	15	28	43	0	3-30
Tomich, J.	12	16	25	41	0	5-26
Warfield, E.	12	18	21	39	3-1	0
Ogord, J.	12	11	23	34	0	1-6
Rucker, M.	12	15	17	32	0	7-48
Brown, R.	12	15	13	28	4-83	0
Booker, M.	12	8	17	25	1-8	0
McFarlin, O.	12	5	19	24	0	0
Kelsay, C.	11	10	13	23	0	2.5-15
Shaw, B.	12	10	12	22	0	1.5-11
Terwilliger, R.	11	5	15	20	0	1-7
Wiltz, J.	12	5	15	20	0	1-6
Toine, T.	12	6	9	15	0	0
List, G.	10	11	3	14	1-0	0
Jackson, J.	10	3	10	13	1-0	0.5-3
Brown, M.	11	8	4	12	1-44	0
Fullman, M.	10	8	4	12	0	0
Johnson, E.	9	2	10	12	0	0
Saltsman, S.	12	0	12	12	0	0
Ortiz, T.	9	3	7	10	0	1-6
Walther, E.	7	4	4	8	0	0
Peterson, J.	9	3	3	6	0	0
Warren, S.	8	2	4	6	0	0.5-3
Legate, B.	8	1	4	5	0	0
Allen, D.	5	3	2	5	0	2-9
Kohl, J.	7	0	3	3	0	0
Buettgenback, B.	6	0	2	2	0	0
Roberts, M.	5	1	1	2	0	0
Ryan, E.	1	0	2	2	0	0
Bloshak, C.	5	1	1	2	0	0
Sears, K.	3	1	1	2	0	0
Benes, J.	9	1	1	2	0	0

TEAM STATISTICS

	NU	OPP
Total Offensive Yards	5,069	3,065
Net Rushing Yards	3,503	1,006
Passing Yards	2,059	2,059

Scoring	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	TOT
NU	82	169	167	94	512
Opponents	29	40	20	64	153

1996 NEBRASKA FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

Record	(Conference)	— 11-2 (8-1)
Sept. 7	Michigan State	W, 55-14
Sept. 21	@ Arizona State	L, 19-0
Sept. 28	Colorado State	W, 65-9
Oct. 5	@ Kansas State	W, 39-3
Oct. 12	Baylor	W, 49-0
Oct. 19	@ Texas Tech	W, 24-10
Oct. 26	Kansas	W, 63-7
Nov. 2	@ Oklahoma	W, 73-21
Nov. 9	Missouri	W, 51-7
Nov. 16	@ Iowa State	W, 49-14
Nov. 29	Colorado	W, 17-12
Dec. 7	vs. Texas*	L, 37-27
Jan. 1	vs. Virginia Tech\$	W, 41-21

* Big 12 Championship — St. Louis, Mo.
\$ FedEx Orange Bowl — Miami, Fla.

BEST and WORST of 1996

The year in football

So Nebraska didn't win a third consecutive national championship. That isn't reason to dismiss the 1996 season with a wave of the hand or just toss it aside like an Iowa State tackler. Is it?

Sure an all-or-nothing mentality pervades college football. Being No. 1, winning a national championship, has become an obsession, with anything less regarded as failure.

But we don't have to adopt that mentality. We're adults here. We can think for ourselves.

It's more difficult, certainly, not to focus on the national title after celebrating two in a row. But that's what makes national titles worth celebrating. Winning one, much less two, isn't easy.

As Tom Osborne has reminded us, the journey should be more important than the destination, and this season's journey was pretty interesting if you stop to think about it. Nebraska began the season at No. 1, dropped to No. 8 (or No. 7, depending on which poll you consulted) after losing at Arizona State, then worked its way back to No. 3 before losing to (ugh) Texas in the first Big 12 playoff game.

And even after losing to unranked (ugh) Texas, Nebraska dropped only three places in the polls, to No. 6. That shows the degree of national respect Osborne's program enjoyed in 1996.

The Cornhuskers played in a new conference. They extended their home winning streak to 36 games, which entered the all-time NCAA list at No. 10. And they represented themselves well.

We know well enough the worst of 1996. So this year, let's focus on the best. Nebraska football is supposed to be fun, first and foremost. So that's where we'll begin in this non-linear look at the season. Consider what follows a word montage of highlights (and maybe a few lowlights) from 1996.

POST OFFICE POSTER?

Sophomore I-back Ahman Green was featured on the cover of the Sept. 16 issue of *Sports Illustrated*. The headline said: "Red Alert: Ahman Green and Nebraska set their sights on a third straight national title." Five days after the publication date, the Cornhuskers lost to Arizona State. Before that, however, Green said of the cover photo: "To me, it was like a wanted sign with a \$1,000 reward posted on it."

Despite being hampered by injuries, including a turf toe and a stress fracture in his left foot, Green led Nebraska in rushing, with 917 yards and seven touchdowns. He averaged 5.9 yards per carry.



Michael Chow

THINGS THAT GO BUMP, DOUBLE

Senior wingback Jon Vedral was unique, and not just because of his appreciation for the music of the heavy metal band Metallica. By the way, does one appreciate heavy metal music, is that the proper description? Anyhow, Vedral, who walked on from Gregory, S.D., was versatile.

Said Osborne: "Jonnie Vedral, for three years, has been a key player in the kicking game. He holds for extra-points and field goals, and he's a 'double-bumper' on the punt team."

What's a double-bumper? Osborne explained.

"Almost any punt protection scheme that you devise, you can take care of everybody man-to-man. But eventually, somebody's got to block two people with the right configuration, and that's hard to do when they're flying at you," he said. "Jonnie is essentially the guy who has to do that."

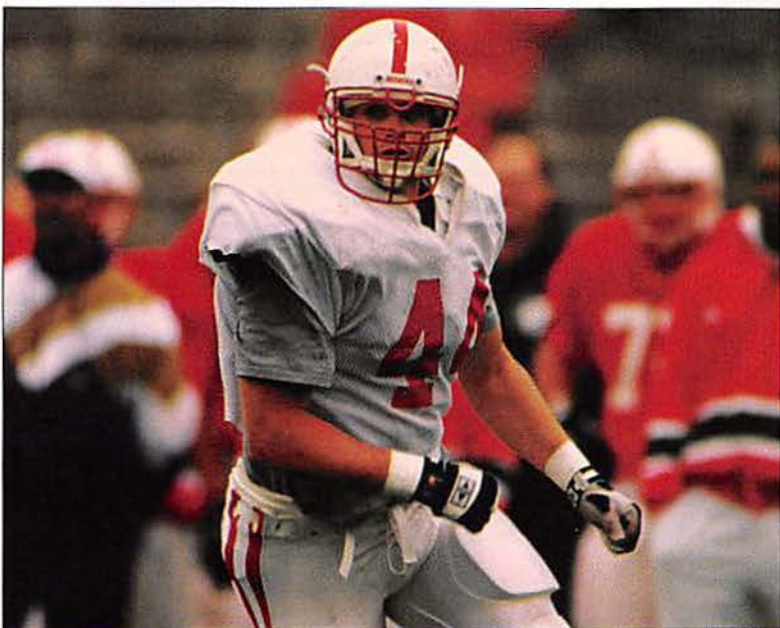


Jon Waller

STARTER, AT LAST

Senior middle linebacker Jon Hesse became a starter and earned first-team All-Big 12 recognition from the Associated Press. After the opener, he tried to express how he felt about starting: "I can't even describe the feeling, waiting four years to start, being there when the game is on the line, when things are happening. I sat there in the fourth quarter and thought: 'I've got a great life. This feels great.'"

Burger King awarded a \$10,000 academic scholarship to Nebraska in the name of Hesse. Osborne, who sang the school fight song in a Burger King television commercial that aired last season, said following the announcement, "I guess he won some kind of \$10,000 scholarship from Burger King, which I kind of made famous. So maybe it was a spillover from that."



Jon Waller

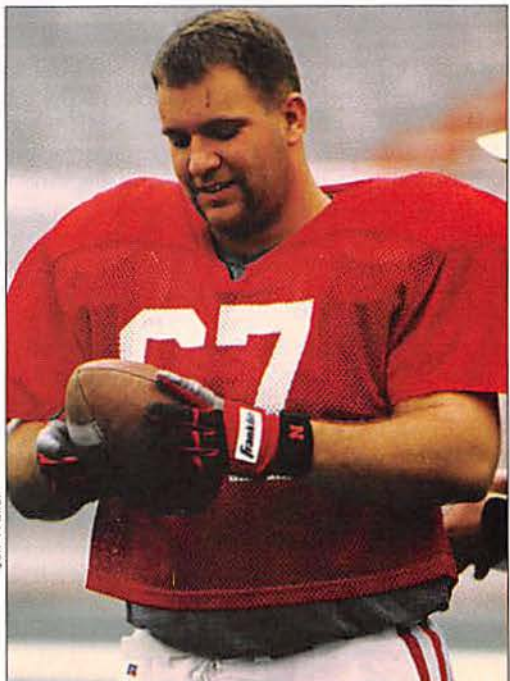
GUARD... NO, CENTER... NO, GUARD...

Junior Aaron Taylor, first-team All-Big Eight and a third-team All-American as an offensive guard last season, was moved to center to replace All-American Aaron Graham this season. "For a while, I was afraid we had taken a great guard and made him into an average center," Osborne said early on.

Average center? Taylor was first-team All-Big 12 according to both the Associated Press and the conference coaches. He was a first-team All-American according to the *Football News*, the Walter Camp Foundation and the Football Writers. And he was a semifinalist for the Outland Trophy.

He played center and both guard positions during the season.

Nebraska recruited Taylor from Rider High in Wichita Falls, Texas. No Texas schools were interested in him because of his height. He's listed at 6-foot-1. Nebraska was ideal, anyway. "We were on the sideline in the Fiesta Bowl, watching Florida. Their linemen were in pass pro, on their heels all the time. I told Matt Vrzal, I think it was, that I couldn't play at a school like that. You could never fire out. As an offensive lineman, you want to do that. You want to go out and roll over a 190-pound free safety or cornerback once in a while, just to make it fun... go back to the huddle and high-five."



Jon Waller



Jon Waller

BOOKEND ALL-AMERICANS

Rush ends Grant Wistrom and Jared Tomich... well, Osborne said it best in early November, as the Cornhuskers headed into the stretch: "Right now, Jared and Grant Wistrom are playing very close to the level of Trev Alberts three years ago, and, to me, Trev was kind of the standard in terms of rush ends. I don't think anyone ever played better than Trev. But those guys are playing at that level right now."

Tomich, who was one of four finalists for the Lombardi trophy, earned his second-straight first-team All-American honors after finishing with 41 tackles, five sacks and caused a team-high four fumbles.

Named the Big 12's Defensive Player of the Year, Wistrom led the team in sacks (9.5 for 48 yards in loss) and tackles for loss (20 for 74).

FRESH FACES

True freshmen Ralph Brown and DeAngelo Evans made significant contributions this season. Brown started every game at right cornerback. Evans started only one game at I-back but played in 11.

Brown made 28 tackles, intercepted four passes and broke up 12. The four interceptions, which he returned for a combined 83 yards and one touchdown, were second on the team to Mike Minter's five. Evans was the team's second-leading rusher with 776 yards and 14 touchdowns. The 776 rushing yards are the third-highest by a freshman in Cornhusker history. He also caught 12 passes for 75 yards.

After the 55-14 opening-game victory against Michigan State, Brown said his teammates "tried to tell me, you've got to relax, take some deep breaths... I took a lot of deep breaths."

Said defensive backs coach George Darlington of what Brown faced in his first year as a collegian: "How tough is it to pick up? The stuff we're doing here is the same thing they're doing in Green Bay, Tyrone Williams told me. We've been playing pro coverages for years, he said. We might be more complex than any college team I know of. That might be good or bad.

"We might be so complex, we're confused."

Evans impressed everyone with his maturity, both physically and emotionally. He handled interviews like a veteran. "You don't want to say the wrong thing. Sometimes, you're almost baited to," he said.

Evans was effective because... "He doesn't spend a lot of time messing around, trying to figure out where to go," said assistant head coach and running backs coach Frank Solich. Sounds simple.



Jon Waller



Doug DeVoe



UNHANDY?

Scott Frost completed 104-of-200 passes for 1,440 yards and 13 touchdowns, with only three interceptions. The 1,440 yards were the eighth-highest single-season total in school history. Frost was only 6-of-14 for 56 yards in the 17-12 victory against Colorado, however.

Afterward, Osborne suggested that part of the passing problem that day might have been Frost's smallish hands, which made gripping the ball in inclement weather difficult.

Osborne apparently regretted the comment, as the next Tuesday news conference indicated. Frost preceded Osborne in front of reporters. As Osborne passed the exiting Frost, he extended his right hand and compared it to Frost's. "Let's see those hands," Osborne said. Then, before discussing injuries, he began the news conference by acknowledging that Frost's hands weren't all that small after all: "I just checked it on the way out. They're bigger than mine . . . and I was a great passer in my day."

Earlier, Frost had said: "I don't know. I don't think my hands are too small."

Jon Waller

MAN OF MANY WORDS

Sophomore wingback Lance Brown played a good game, when given the opportunity. He caught five passes for 101 yards and one touchdown, in six games. He also talked a good game.

Said Frost of Brown: "He's got a lot of spirit. He's one of the few guys on offense who can sometimes match Terrell (Farley) and those guys as far as talking goes. Sometimes, he gets us fired up and gets some emotion going." As good as he was, however, Brown was no Broderick Thomas.

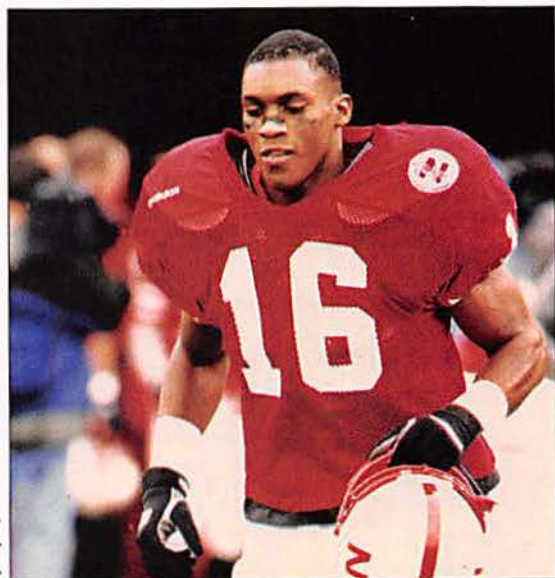
PRIMARY PLAYER

Senior Eric Stokes was the starting free safety most of the season. But when Mike Minter was moved from rover to weakside linebacker after Terrell Farley was dismissed from the team, Stokes became the starting rover. He also could play cornerback at a moment's notice. After the Kansas State victory, defensive coordinator Charlie McBride, not one to hand out compliments lightly, said: "Stokes can play anything. He's the most valuable guy we've got. He's saved us as far as depth."

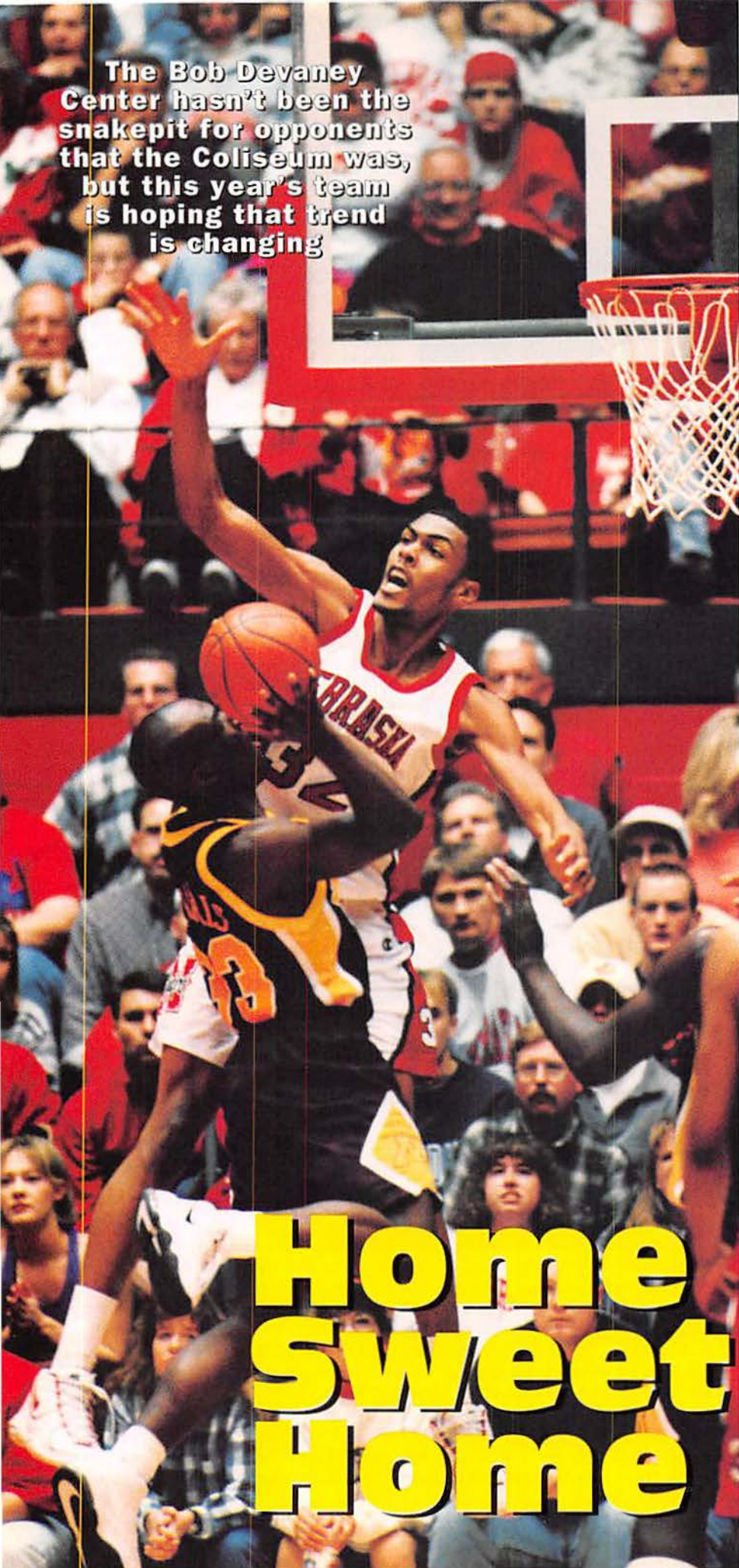
Stokes finished with 45 tackles, 22 of them unassisted. But his most impressive unassisted tackle wasn't included in that total because it came in the first major scrimmage of fall camp.

Stokes hit quarterback Scott Frost hard enough to knock off Frost's left shoe. "That was the No. 1 shot of my life. I tried to size him up . . . I had to let everything go because he goes at 215 and I'm 185. I didn't worry about the fact he might be our starting quarterback. He was loose, and when you get a shot like that, you take it." Stokes wasn't worried that Frost might end up the No. 1 quarterback, which he did. But there might have been a coach or two who did.

Jon Waller



Jon Waller



The Bob Devaney Center hasn't been the snakepit for opponents that the Coliseum was, but this year's team is hoping that trend is changing

Home Sweet Home

The emotional spark in Nebraska's 75-67 victory against Oregon State in late November was a brief altercation involving Tyrone Lue and John-Blair Bickestaff. There was some shoving and maybe the throwing of an elbow or two before an official stepped in and separated the combatants.

"I don't want a thing like that to happen," Lue told reporters afterward. "But it got the crowd going. That's the loudest I've heard it since I've been here, and it got us a nice little run."

The crowd of 11,007 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center responded more than once that night. A blocked shot by Venson Hamilton was applauded enthusiastically, as was a slam dunk by Cookie Belcher, off a perfectly timed alley-oop pass from Bernard Garner. Such plays set the arena to rocking.

It had the intensity of a conference game, according to coach Danny Nee.

More accurately, perhaps, it had the intensity Nee is hoping to see during conference home games this season. Among his preseason goals was to "develop the mentality of defending the home court, which I think we've lost the last two years in the conference," he said in early November.

Nebraska was a combined 5-9 in home conference games in 1995 and 1996, after going 21-7 the previous four seasons (all of which included trips to the NCAA Tournament).

In all six seasons, the Cornhuskers had a decided advantage at home. But the advantage the last two years was a result of non-conference success. "I'm trying to develop an attitude with this team to carry through the whole season, not just non-conference, of how to play at home," Nee said.

"I just don't think we've gotten it done (at home). That's been our problem."

The Devaney Sports Center hasn't exactly been a snakepit for visiting teams, of late. "We haven't had it really rocking in a while," said Nee. At least, not consistently the Cornhuskers haven't.

Unlike some facilities, the Sports Center doesn't intimidate visitors by itself. There is nothing imposing or

HOOPS

ominous about its architecture. It depends on crowds for its character. If the fans get excited, if they stand and cheer as they did at the Oregon State game, it can help Nebraska.

"Otherwise, I don't think it's a very tough place to play," said Nee.

Nebraska fans take their cue from the Cornhuskers, not vice versa. "We have good crowds. I think our crowds are solid," Nee said. But their enthusiasm is "usually initiated by what we do."

The Sports Center is comfortable enough that fans will sit back and relax when the action lags.

It wasn't always so. Nebraska's former home, the Coliseum, had a significant effect on visiting teams. What were deficiencies from a fan's standpoint were definite advantages for the Cornhuskers.

Its bench seating was cramped, which meant spectators would just as soon stand and cheer. Students had to arrive early, and often wait in line, to get the best bleacher seats at courtside. After a long wait, broken sometimes by a freshman game, students were eager for action and ready to yell.

What was the Coliseum's intimacy for Nebraska could be claustrophobia for a visiting team. The close

After posting a 5-9 record in home conference games over the last two years, Nee would like his team to develop the mentality of defending the home court better.

quarters enabled the more zealous fans to reach out and touch opposing players, literally.

The bleachers began at courtside, which meant there was a restraining line behind which players stood to throw in-bounds passes. Sometimes, visiting players could be distracted by Nebraska students pulling on their shorts or the hair on their legs. . . providing, of course, the officials didn't notice.

When Cornhusker teams coached by Joe Cipriano pressed in the Coliseum, crowds counted to 10 so quickly and with such force when opponents brought the ball up court that officials could be influenced to speed up their count, meaning opponents might have less than 10 seconds to reach mid-court.

The Coliseum was home to Cipriano's teams for 13 seasons, during which their record was 115-34 (.772). More significantly, however, they were 64-37 (.703) in conference play.

They had a losing record in conference games only twice in those 13 seasons.

Cipriano's teams went 6-1 in conference play at home four times, and the 1965-66 team went 7-0. That team, one of the best in school history, was undefeated in 11 home games, overall, on the way to a 20-5 record. The perfect record at home was the only one in modern Nebraska history, pre-dating even

the opening of the Coliseum in 1926. The Cornhuskers extended their home winning streak to 20 games over two seasons before fifth-ranked Kansas ended it 64-57 in March of 1967.

The Coliseum's effect on visiting teams was demonstrated even more dramatically during the nine-season coaching tenure of Jerry Bush, Cipriano's immediate predecessor. Bush never had a winning season at Nebraska. His record was 81-132 (.380). But it was 59-37 (.615) at the Coliseum, including 30-29 (.508) in conference games — compared to a dismal 8-51 (.136) in conference road games.

The Coliseum's benefits were more than offset by its negatives, however. It wasn't fan friendly and, more importantly, it hindered recruiting. The Coliseum was a state-of-the-art facility for major college basketball when it was dedicated in 1926. But at age 50, its time had passed.

Nee's teams have always won more than they've lost at home. Going into this season, his record at the Sports Center was 123-37 (.769). In conference play, however, it was 40-30 (.571).

The Cornhuskers are capable of better, according to Nee. They just need the proper mindset. That's what he was looking for as they began Big 12 play at home against Texas A&M on Jan. 11. ■



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MEN'S HOOP RESULTS

BIG 12 CONFERENCE

NORTH STANDINGS

TEAM	OVERALL	CONFERENCE
Kansas	13-0	1-0
Iowa State	10-0	1-0
Colorado	10-3	1-0
Missouri	8-5	0-1
Nebraska	7-5	0-1
Kansas State	7-4	0-1

SOUTH STANDINGS

TEAM	OVERALL	CONFERENCE
Oklahoma	9-2	1-0
Texas Tech	9-2	1-0
Texas	7-3	1-0
Baylor	11-2	0-1
Oklahoma St.	7-4	0-1
Texas A&M	6-5	0-1

BAYLOR

11/22	S. Illinois	L. 76-77
11/23	UNC-Wilmington	W. 74-54
11/24	Montana	W. 77-71
11/30	LaMar	W. 73-68
12/3	Missouri-K.C.	W. 79-71 (OT)
12/6	N.E. Louisiana	W. 67-63
12/7	Texas Southern	W. 94-63
12/14	✓ Auburn	W. 68-63
12/18	Prairie View A&M	W. 76-63
12/21	Texas-Pan American	W. 66-57
12/28	Northwestern State	W. 65-56
12/31	✓ Drake	W. 87-55
1/4	✓ Texas Tech	L. 86-75
1/8	✓ Texas A&M	
1/11	✓ Kansas	
1/14	✓ Missouri	
1/18	✓ Oklahoma	
1/21	✓ Colorado	
1/25	✓ Oklahoma State	
1/29	✓ Texas	
2/1	✓ Oklahoma State	
2/5	✓ Iowa State	
2/10	✓ Hardin-Simmons	
2/12	✓ Texas	
2/15	✓ Texas Tech	
2/19	✓ Nebraska	
2/22	✓ Texas A&M	
2/26	✓ Kansas State	
3/1	✓ Oklahoma	

COLORADO

11/24	✓ Drake	W. 82-80 (OT)
11/29	✓ Auburn	W. 78-72 (OT)
11/30	✓ Virginia Tech	W. 63-56
12/1	✓ Louisville	L. 92-82
12/5	✓ Texas-Arlington	W. 81-52
12/7	✓ George Mason	L. 85-81
12/9	✓ Wyoming	W. 84-68
12/12	✓ Colorado State	W. 76-69
12/21	✓ UC-Santa Barbara	W. 76-55
12/23	✓ Georgia	L. 62-52
12/28	✓ Missouri-Kan. City	W. 82-61
12/30	✓ Northwestern State	W. 82-70
1/4	✓ Nebraska	W. 79-73
1/8	✓ Missouri	
1/11	✓ Texas Tech	
1/15	✓ Oklahoma State	
1/18	✓ Iowa State	
1/22	✓ Baylor	
1/26	✓ Kansas	
1/29	✓ Kansas State	
2/5	✓ Nebraska	
2/8	✓ Texas A&M	
2/12	✓ Oklahoma	
2/15	✓ Kansas	
2/19	✓ Kansas State	
2/22	✓ Missouri	
2/24	✓ Wofford	
2/26	✓ Iowa State	
3/1	✓ Texas	

IOWA STATE

11/26	✓ Alcorn State	W. 87-58
12/1	✓ MD-Eastern Shore	W. 82-62
12/5	✓ Tenn.-Martin	W. 57-36
12/6	✓ Siena	W. 64-54
12/11	✓ Drake	W. 74-50
12/14	✓ Iowa	W. 81-74
12/21	✓ E. Tenn. State	W. 77-49
12/22	✓ Texas-El Paso	W. 59-48
12/30	✓ Texas-Pan American	W. 66-42
1/4	✓ Missouri	W. 68-65
1/7	✓ Marquette	
1/11	✓ Oklahoma	
1/13	✓ Kansas	
1/18	✓ Colorado	
1/22	✓ Kansas State	
1/25	✓ Texas Tech	
1/29	✓ Nebraska	
2/1	✓ Texas A&M	
2/5	✓ Baylor	
2/9	✓ Kansas	
2/12	✓ Missouri	
2/15	✓ Kansas State	
2/19	✓ Texas	
2/22	✓ Nebraska	
2/26	✓ Colorado	
3/1	✓ Oklahoma State	

KANSAS

11/22	✓ Santa Clara	W. 76-64
11/25	✓ Louisiana State	W. 82-53
11/26	✓ California	W. 85-67
11/27	✓ Virginia	W. 80-63
12/1	✓ San Diego	W. 79-72
12/4	✓ Cincinnati	W. 72-65
12/7	✓ UCLA	W. 96-83
12/11	✓ Geo. Washington	W. 85-56
12/15	✓ UNC-Asheville	W. 105-73
12/21	✓ N.C. State	W. 84-56
12/30	✓ Washburn	W. 90-65
1/2	✓ Brown	W. 107-49
1/4	✓ Kansas State	W. 62-59
1/6	✓ Texas	
1/9	✓ Niagara	
1/11	✓ Baylor	
1/14	✓ Iowa State	
1/19	✓ Connecticut	
1/22	✓ Texas A&M	
1/26	✓ Colorado	
1/29	✓ Texas Tech	
2/1	✓ Nebraska	
2/4	✓ Missouri	
2/9	✓ Iowa State	
2/12	✓ Oklahoma State	
2/15	✓ Colorado	
2/17	✓ Missouri	
2/22	✓ Kansas State	
2/24	✓ Oklahoma	
3/2	✓ Nebraska	

KANSAS STATE

11/22	✓ Missouri-K.C.	W. 73-53
11/26	✓ UNC-Asheville	W. 80-54
11/30	✓ Morgan State	W. 85-66
12/3	✓ Wichita State	L. 74-59
12/7	✓ Bradley	W. 73-61
12/12	✓ Coppin State	W. 84-80
12/14	✓ Bethune-Cookman	W. 62-54
12/21	✓ Michigan State	L. 75-43
12/23	✓ Ark.-Pine Bluff	W. 69-63
12/29	✓ Xavier	L. 95-54
1/4	✓ Kansas	L. 62-59
1/12	✓ Texas	
1/15	✓ Nebraska	
1/18	✓ Texas Tech	
1/22	✓ Iowa State	
1/25	✓ Texas A&M	
1/29	✓ Colorado	
2/1	✓ Missouri	
2/5	✓ Oklahoma State	
2/8	✓ Oklahoma	
2/10	✓ Nebraska	
2/15	✓ Iowa State	
2/19	✓ Colorado	
2/22	✓ Kansas	
2/26	✓ Baylor	
3/1	✓ Missouri	

MISSOURI

11/23	✓ Chicago State	W. 76-46
11/29	✓ Tenn.-Chattanooga	W. 83-74
11/30	✓ Clemson	L. 47-45
12/1	✓ Creighton	W. 73-71 (OT)
12/4	✓ Arkansas State	W. 81-47
12/7	✓ Arkansas	L. 80-76
12/15	✓ SE Missouri State	W. 64-50
12/17	✓ NW Missouri State	W. 77-56
12/19	✓ Mercer	W. 90-63
12/21	✓ Iowa	L. 88-77
12/28	✓ Illinois	L. 85-69
12/30	✓ Southern	W. 111-69
1/4	✓ Iowa State	L. 68-65
1/7	✓ Colorado	
1/11	✓ Oklahoma State	
1/14	✓ Baylor	
1/18	✓ Nebraska	
1/22	✓ Nebraska	
1/26	✓ Texas	
1/28	✓ Texas A&M	
2/1	✓ Kansas State	
2/4	✓ Kansas	
2/9	✓ Wake Forest	
2/12	✓ Iowa State	
2/15	✓ Oklahoma	
2/17	✓ Kansas	
2/22	✓ Colorado	
2/25	✓ Texas Tech	
3/1	✓ Kansas State	

NEBRASKA

11/23	✓ Texas	L. 83-81 (OT)
11/26	✓ Weber State	W. 83-66
11/30	✓ Oregon State	W. 75-67
12/3	✓ Texas-San Antonio	W. 79-76
12/6	✓ Coppin State	W. 88-72
12/7	✓ Bowling Green	W. 73-68
12/11	✓ Missouri-K.C.	W. 76-64
12/21	✓ Minnesota	L. 70-56
12/30	✓ Old Dominion	W. 72-66
12/31	✓ Cincinnati	W. 72-66
1/1	✓ Bowling Green	L. 58-55
1/4	✓ Colorado	L. 79-73
1/8	✓ Creighton	
1/11	✓ Texas A&M	
1/15	✓ Kansas State	
1/18	✓ Missouri	
1/22	✓ Missouri	
1/25	✓ Oklahoma	
1/29	✓ Iowa State	
2/1	✓ Kansas	
2/5	✓ Colorado	
2/8	✓ Texas Tech	
2/10	✓ Kansas State	
2/13	✓ Northern Iowa	
2/16	✓ Texas	
2/19	✓ Baylor	
2/22	✓ Iowa State	
2/26	✓ Oklahoma State	
3/2	✓ Kansas	

OKLAHOMA

11/23	✓ N.E. Louisiana	W. 95-68
11/27	✓ Sam Houston State	W. 84-51
11/30	✓ Coppin State	W. 88-64
12/4	✓ Delaware State	W. 83-56
12/7	✓ SE Missouri State	W. 83-52
12/14	✓ Centenary College	W. 89-45
12/21	✓ Purdue	W. 82-58
12/23	✓ Memphis	L. 61-47
12/27	✓ Western Illinois	W. 74-62
12/28	✓ Tulsa	L. 78-75
1/5	✓ Texas A&M	W. 78-59
1/11	✓ Iowa State	
1/15	✓ Texas Tech	
1/18	✓ Baylor	
1/22	✓ Texas	
1/25	✓ Nebraska	
1/27	✓ Oklahoma State	
2/1	✓ Texas	
2/4	✓ Texas A&M	
2/8	✓ Kansas State	
2/12	✓ Colorado	
2/15	✓ Missouri	
2/19	✓ Texas Tech	
2/22	✓ Oklahoma State	
2/24	✓ Kansas	
3/1	✓ Baylor	

OKLAHOMA STATE

11/20	✓ St. Mary's (Calif.)	W. 71-70
11/22	✓ Tulsa	L. 72-54
12/2	✓ N. Carolina A&T	W. 81-67
12/4	✓ Miss. Valley State	W. 77-74
12/7	✓ Arizona State	L. 68-67
12/16	✓ Alcorn State	W. 84-72
12/18	✓ Coll. of Charleston	W. 67-49
12/21	✓ Southern Methodist	W. 73-54
12/23	✓ Arkansas State	L. 56-53
12/30	✓ Nevada-Reno	W. 70-50
1/4	✓ Texas	L. 92-58
1/8	✓ Texas Tech	
1/11	✓ Missouri	
1/15	✓ Colorado	
1/18	✓ UNLV	
1/20	✓ Texas Tech	
1/25	✓ Baylor	
1/27	✓ Oklahoma	
1/29	✓ Oral Roberts	
2/1	✓ Baylor	
2/5	✓ Kansas State	
2/8	✓ Texas	
2/12	✓ Kansas	
2/15	✓ Texas A&M	
2/19	✓ Texas A&M	
2/22	✓ Oklahoma	
2/26	✓ Nebraska	
3/1	✓ Iowa State	

TEXAS

11/23	✓ Nebraska	W. 83-81 (OT)
11/27	✓ Rhode Island	W. 86-79
12/4	✓ Florida	W. 82-64
12/7	✓ North Texas	W. 71-56
12/9	✓ Arizona	L. 83-78
12/14	✓ Fresno State	W. 98-86
12/18	✓ Oregon State	W. 86-83
12/21	✓ Utah	L. 80-68
12/31	✓ Providence	L. 74-66
1/4	✓ Oklahoma State	W. 92-58
1/6	✓ Kansas	
1/12	✓ Kansas State	
1/15	✓ Texas A&M	
1/19	✓ Louisville	
1/22	✓ Oklahoma	
1/26	✓ Missouri	
1/28	✓ Baylor	
2/1	✓ Oklahoma	
2/3	✓ Texas Tech	
2/8	✓ Oklahoma State	
2/12	✓ Baylor	
2/16	✓ Nebraska	
2/19	✓ Iowa State	
2/22	✓ Texas Tech	
2/25	✓ Texas A&M	
3/1	✓ Colorado	

TEXAS A&M

11/23	✓ N. Carolina A&T	W. 68-62
11/26	✓ Colorado State	W. 59-58
12/1	✓ Illinois-Chicago	W. 61-54
12/5	✓ North Texas	L. 84-78
12/7	✓ SE Louisiana	W. 86-55
12/10	✓ Georgia Southern	W. 83-38
12/20	✓ Missouri-K.C.	W. 74-73 (OT)
12/22	✓ Clemson	L. 76-64
12/27	✓ Princeton	L. 46-38
12/28	✓ Northern Iowa	L. 82-70
1/5	✓ Oklahoma	L. 78-59
1/8	✓ Baylor	
1/11	✓ Nebraska	
1/15	✓ Texas	
1/22	✓ Kansas	
1/25	✓ Kansas State	
1/28	✓ Missouri	
2/1	✓ Iowa State	
2/4	✓ Oklahoma	
2/8	✓ Colorado	
2/12	✓ Texas Tech	
2/15	✓ Oklahoma State	
2/19	✓ Oklahoma State	
2/22	✓ Baylor	
2/25	✓ Texas	
3/2	✓ Texas Tech	

TEXAS TECH

11/22	✓ S. Mississippi	W. 96-76
11/25	✓ Nicholls State	W. 80-73
11/30	✓ Geo. Washington	W. 84-75
12/2	✓ Ark.-Little Rock	W. 94-83
12/4	✓ New Mexico	W. 77-68
12/14	✓ TCU	L. 93-89
12/17	✓ Texas-San Antonio	W. 99-51
12/21	✓ Fresno State	W. 111-101
12/27	✓ New Mexico State	L. 122-105
12/28	✓ Wyoming	W. 77-74
1/4	✓ Baylor	W. 86-75
1/8	✓ Oklahoma State	
1/11	✓ Colorado	
1/15	✓ Oklahoma	
1/18	✓ Kansas State	
1/20	✓ Oklahoma State	
1/25	✓ Iowa State	
1/29	✓ Kansas	
2/3	✓ Texas	
2/8	✓ Nebraska	
2/12	✓ Texas A&M	
2/15	✓ Baylor	
2/19	✓ Oklahoma	
2/22	✓ Texas	
2/25	✓ Missouri	
3/2	✓ Texas A&M	

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Finishing Fast

With five scholarships remaining, Huskers concentrate on looking for best athlete available, running back and corner

The Cornhuskers continue to go about recruiting at their own pace, riding along with most of their scholarships already committed for. Yet they are still actively recruiting some of the top prep talent in the country. It's

the same story fifth-straight verse for the Huskers as Tom Osborne and company have mastered the art of early commitments.

Nebraska, along with Penn State, Michigan, Ohio State, Notre Dame and Tennessee, are at the head of the class when it comes to early verbals. The Nittany Lions had 14 commitments at press time, Wolverines and Buckeyes 12 with the Gators and Vols at 10.

At the holiday break, the Huskers stood at 14 verbals.

With a little over a month to go in the recruiting cycle, the Huskers only have five more scholarships to give, give or take one or two.

Nebraska's latest commitment comes from the strangest of football areas.

You don't normally think of Hawaii as a prep football Mecca, but in offensive lineman **Dominic Raiola** (6-3, 295, 5.1) of Honolulu (St. Louis) the Huskers will sign a player who plays in one of the best prep football programs in the country.

"I think we finished ranked 15th in the country, so I guess we were pretty good," Raiola said. "I really don't know what to compare it to, but we were a pretty dominant team here on the island and we have several guys who are being recruited. So I guess we are pretty good."

Raiola seems to be pretty good as well. A 365-pound benchner with a 420-pound squat, Raiola earned all-state honors and drew scholarship offers from Utah, Stanford and UCLA. But why is a native Hawaiian drawn to the cold chilly land of Nebraska?

"When I started getting information from them I started getting interested in them," Raiola said. "I really didn't think much about them

before they contacted me, but once they did, I started thinking about how great it would be to play at Nebraska. When I visited I really liked the coaches, the facilities and people, the facilities and the people I met there. Of course Nebraska has a great reputation in college football and a great reputation with its offense. I think I can adapt to the weather and look forward to playing for the best college football program in the country."



By
**JAMES
HALE**

Raiola joins what is already an outstanding recruiting class, headlined at the moment with four preseason All-Americans. Quarterbacks **Eric Crouch**

(6-0, 185, 4.5) of Omaha (Millard North), Neb., and **Bobby Newcombe** (6-0, 185, 4.5) of Albuquerque (Highland), N.M., fill critical needs.

Irwin Swinney (6-0, 180, 4.45) of Lincoln (Northeast), Neb., is one of the very best pure athletes in the country and linebacker **Kyle Vanden Bosch** (6-4, 235, 4.55) seems perfectly suited as the next great pass rusher for the Huskers.

Noseguard **Justin Ferrell** (6-4, 290, 5.0) of Mission (Sharyland), Texas has rehabbed an injured knee and will enroll at Nebraska in time for the second semester. His scholarship will count back toward last year's class.

On the Huskers' initial recruiting weekend, key defensive backs **Jason Willis** (5-10, 160, 4.4) of Denver (Mullen), Colo., **Robert Carswell** (6-0, 205, 4.5) of Stone Mountain, Ga., and **Dion Booker** (6-1, 187, 4.5) of Oceanside, Calif., will be heavily pursued.

Willis is a pure corner who has tripped to Nebraska and has a visit planned to Arizona State (Jan. 10). Carswell is one of the top 20 players in the South and has visited Notre Dame (Dec. 6) and NU (Dec. 13). He will take his final three visits to Florida State (Jan. 10), Tennessee (Jan. 18) and Clemson (Jan. 24).

RECRUITING

"I have liked both my visits thus far," Carswell said. "Now, what I am going to do is to go out and take my next three while comparing my first two with the next ones. I really don't have a favorite, but the first two I took are the ones that I really thought I would like the most, and I really don't think I was disappointed."

Booker took his visit back-to-back in conjunction with a weekend trip to Texas. Booker has indicated that the Huskers and the Longhorns are both at the top of his list. Texas is looking for an entire secondary, while the Huskers hope Booker steps in for his graduated brother at cornerback.

Zimbalist Carter (6-1, 170, 4.6) of Riverside (Poly), Calif., is another All-American who has visited Lincoln. Free safety Carter also visited California (Nov. 22) and Colorado (Dec. 20). Washington State (Jan. 24) and Arizona State are still ahead.

Tracy Wistrom (6-5, 200, 4.7) of Webb City, Mo., is keeping his options open and is doing what is best for him. Most continue to think that Wistrom will commit to the Huskers following in his All-American brother's (Grant) foot-

steps. Wistrom has visited Northwestern (Dec. 7), Nebraska (Dec. 13) and will travel to Kansas State (Jan. 21). His other possibilities are Missouri, Tennessee and Alabama.

Offensive lineman Lynn Larabee (6-3, 245, 5.0) of Oklahoma City (Western Heights) also visited but it looks as if he's leaning towards Oklahoma.

The Huskers are also involved with some of the top running backs in the country.

Anthony Thomas (6-1, 230, 4.5) of

Winnfield, La., has been to Michigan and Nebraska with looks at Notre Dame, Florida State, OU and Illinois as possibilities. In addition to Nebraska, Jamal Lewis (6-1, 215, 4.5) of Atlanta (Douglass), Ga., has also looked at Michigan, Ohio State, LSU and Tennessee.

Levron Williams (6-3, 205, 4.5) of Evansville (Bosse), Ind., is also talking Nebraska. The Huskers are in fine company with USC, Ohio State, Tennessee and Michigan. Najae Davenport (6-1, 220, 4.4) of Miami (Central Florida) also has Nebraska

VERBALS TO DATE

PLAYER	POS	HT	WT	SP	HOMETOWN (SCHOOL)
Steve Alstadt	OL	6-5	255	5.2	Fort Calhoun, Neb.
Grant Bunton*	DB	6-0	200	4.5	Shawnee (Mission NW), Kan.
James Burrows	LB	6-3	230	4.8	Ames, Iowa
Ben Cornelsen	DB	6-0	175	4.5	Shawnee (Mission NW), Kan.
Eric Crouch	QB	6-0	185	4.5	Omaha (Millard North), Neb.
Matt Davison	WR	6-2	170	4.5	Tecumseh, Neb.
Kyle Kollmorgen	OL	6-4	267	5.2	Lincoln (Southeast), Neb.
Glen Matthews	DT	6-4	300	4.9	N. Dakota State
Bobby Newcombe	QB	6-0	185	4.5	Albuquerque (Highland), N.M.
Dominic Raiola	OL	6-3	295	5.1	Honolulu (St. Louis), Hawaii
Irwin Swinney	WR	6-0	180	4.4	Lincoln (Northeast), Neb.
Kyle Vanden Bosch	LB	6-4	235	4.5	Inwood (West Lyon), Iowa
Mark Vedral	LB	6-1	200	4.7	Gregory, S.D.
David Volke	OL	6-5	260	4.8	Battle Creek, Neb.
John Paul Wichmann	DE	6-4	210	4.6	Shawnee (Mission NW), Kan.

* Will receive an academic scholarship

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out in front of Pittsburgh, Miami, Florida and Florida State. Eric Gooden (6-3, 215, 4.4) of Midwest City, Okla., is visiting Kansas State (Jan. 21), Nebraska (Jan. 10), Georgia (Jan. 17) with Texas A&M, Tennessee, Notre Dame and Oklahoma State working for his fifth

visit.

Nebraska is also working on All-American tight end Carver Donaldson (6-6, 250, 4.8) who has already been to Florida State, Florida and Notre Dame with looks to Nebraska and Penn State ahead.

With so many visits left to offer,

but so few scholarships the Huskers can afford to be selective. Nebraska remains in the hunt for at least 30 of the top 100 players in the country. They can go with a "first come, first choose basis," or they can be picky and work on a certain position.

It's a great position to be in. ■

TOP PLAYERS IN THE BIG 12 REGION

PLAYER	HT	WT	SP	HOMETOWN (SCHOOL)	COLLEGES OF INTEREST (As of 12-30-96)
QUARTERBACK					
Edmond Stansbury	6-2	210	4.6	El Paso (Irvin), Texas	Syracuse, Oklahoma, Notre Dame, Texas, BYU
Eric Crouch	6-1	185	4.5	Omaha (Millard North), Neb.	Committed to Nebraska
Terrance Bennett	6-0	180	4.4	Houston (Yates), Texas	Oklahoma, Syracuse, Texas, Kansas, Florida State
Matt Schobel	6-4	218	4.6	Columbus, Texas	Texas, A&M, TCU, Syracuse
Regan George	6-3	180	4.6	New Braunfels (Canyon), Texas	Colorado, Texas, Tech, Oklahoma State, A&M
RUNNING BACK					
Darnell McDonald	5-11	190	4.5	Englewood (Cherry Creek), Colo.	USC, UCLA, Notre Dame, Texas, Miami
Hodges Mitchell	5-7	175	4.3	Dallas (Skyline), Texas	Texas, Notre Dame, Florida State, Michigan, N. Carolina
Ladell Betts	5-10	220	4.5	Blue Springs, Mo.	Notre Dame, Michigan, Tennessee
Eric Gooden	6-3	215	4.5	Midwest City, Okla.	Michigan, Notre Dame, Nebraska, Kansas, A&M, Oklahoma, Okla. St.
Reggie Wright	6-1	195	4.3	Liberty, Texas	Michigan, Texas, Oklahoma State, LSU
RECEIVER					
Harrison Hill	6-0	185	4.5	Wichita (Collegiate), Kan.	Committed to Kansas
Julius McMillan	5-11	170	4.3	Altus, Okla.	Oklahoma, Kansas State
Chris Lewis	5-11	175	4.4	Dallas (Carter), Texas	Oklahoma, Texas, Florida State
David Aaron	6-4	185	4.6	Marshall, Texas	Texas, Miami, Notre Dame, UCLA, Ohio State
Reggie Germany	6-2	175	4.5	St. Louis (Hazelwood East), Mo.	Missouri, Florida State, Florida, Michigan, Tennessee
TIGHT END					
Alvin Murrow	6-4	240	4.7	Kirkwood, Mo.	Missouri, Miami, Florida, Florida State
Chad Irwin	6-4	250	4.7	Baytown (Robert E. Lee), Texas	Arkansas, Michigan, Texas, Oklahoma, Ohio State, A&M
Cole Roberts	6-6	235	4.6	Shallowater, Texas	Tech, Texas, Oklahoma, Baylor
Chris Brooks	6-4	250	4.8	Newton, Texas	Texas, Arkansas, Iowa, Oklahoma, Notre Dame
Dan Engel	6-3	235	4.8	Lakewood, Colo.	Colorado, Colorado State, UCLA, Nebraska
OFFENSIVE LINE					
Devane Robinson	6-3	260	4.8	Midwest City, Okla.	Tennessee, Nebraska, Kansas State, A&M, Oklahoma, Okla. St.
Adam Fay	6-5	280	5.2	Bettendorf, Iowa	Committed to Northwestern
Leonard Davis	6-6	320	5.1	Wortham, Texas	Committed to Texas A&M
Andre Pittman	6-4	305	5.2	Houston (Lamar), Texas	Oklahoma, Nebraska, Texas, A&M, Florida State
Kyle Kollmorgen	6-4	267	5.2	Lincoln (Southeast), Neb.	Committed to Nebraska
DEFENSIVE END					
David Warren	6-5	240	4.6	Tyler (John Tyler), Texas	Texas, A&M, Florida, Florida State, Oklahoma, Michigan
Darryl Bright	6-5	230	4.7	Tulsa (Washington), Okla.	A&M, Nebraska, UCLA, Michigan, Notre Dame, Oklahoma
Cory Callens	6-3	225	4.8	Jenks, Okla.	Oklahoma, A&M, Kansas, Oklahoma State, Kansas State, Texas
Roderick Kelley	6-5	250	4.6	Houston (Yates), Texas	Oklahoma, A&M, Michigan State
Evan Perroni	6-5	250	4.86	Houston (Clear Lake), Texas	A&M, Nebraska, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Florida State
DEFENSIVE TACKLE					
Robert Bernard	6-3	265	5.0	Baytown (Sterling), Texas	Florida State, A&M, Texas, Florida, Nebraska
Shaun Rogers	6-4	280	5.0	La Porte, Texas	Texas, Baylor, Kansas State
John Robertson	6-5	250	4.9	Olathe (East), Kan.	Committed to Kansas State
Adrian Cole	6-5	280	5.3	Aldine (Nimitz), Texas	Texas, A&M, Baylor, LSU
Melvin Williams	6-5	240	4.6	St. Louis (Mehlville), Mo.	Missouri, Kansas State, Kansas, Nebraska
LINEBACKER					
Kyle Vanden Bosch	6-4	235	4.5	Inwood (West Lyon), Iowa	Committed to Nebraska
Grant Irons	6-5	225	4.6	Conroe (McCullough), Texas	A&M, Michigan, Iowa State, Texas, Northwestern
Monty Belsel	6-4	240	4.6	Douglas, Kan.	Committed to Kansas State
Roland Bradley	6-2	215	4.6	La Marque, Texas	A&M, Michigan, Florida State, Colorado
Tracy Wistrom	6-5	200	4.7	Webb City, Mo.	Nebraska, Kansas, Kansas State, Iowa, Colorado
CORNERBACK					
Antwan Alexander	6-0	175	4.5	Midland (Robert E. Lee), Texas	Colorado, Texas, Tech, Nebraska, Oklahoma State, Oklahoma
Quinton Jammer	6-1	180	4.4	Angleton, Texas	Texas, A&M, Colorado, Michigan, Miami, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State
Gary Baxter	6-3	190	4.4	Tyler (John Tyler), Texas	Texas, A&M, Florida, Tech, Oklahoma, Iowa
Amir Al-Amin	6-1	195	4.5	Garland (Lakeview), Texas	Texas, A&M, Baylor, Oklahoma, Arkansas
Jay Brooks	5-9	175	4.5	Killeen (Ellison), Texas	Texas, Nebraska, Michigan, Oklahoma
SAFETY					
Joe Walker	6-1	180	4.5	Galena Park (North Shore), Texas	Notre Dame, Texas, Northwestern, Florida State, Oklahoma
John Norman	6-3	182	4.5	Midland (Robert E. Lee), Texas	Michigan, Nebraska, Colorado, Texas, Tech, Oklahoma, USC
Jason Glenn	6-1	202	4.4	Houston (Nimitz), Texas	Texas, A&M, Tennessee, Colorado, Oklahoma
Kwame Cavil	6-3	195	4.6	Waco, Texas	Texas, Oklahoma, Michigan, Oklahoma State, Nebraska
Larry Hollingquest	6-1	175	4.5	Houston (Sam Houston), Texas	Nebraska, Colorado, Arkansas, A&M, Texas
ATHLETE					
Cedric Cormier	6-0	180	4.32	Galena Park (North Shore), Texas	Texas, LSU, Colorado, Oklahoma, Michigan, Arkansas
Irwin Swinney	6-0	180	4.42	Lincoln (Southeast), Neb.	Committed to Nebraska
Eric Rosel	6-3	190	4.5	Liberal, Kan.	Oklahoma, Kansas, Kansas State, Northwestern
Micky Jones	5-10	170	4.3	Tyler (John Tyler), Texas	Texas, Alabama, A&M
J.T. Thatcher	6-1	175	4.4	Norman, Okla.	Committed to Oklahoma
KICKER					
Jeff Ferguson	6-0	160	4.7	Tulsa (Holland Hall), Okla.	Oklahoma, Tulsa, Vanderbilt, Arkansas, Nebraska, Illinois State
Joe Garcia	5-11	169	4.8	Olathe (North), Kan.	Committed to Kansas
Roy Rios	5-10	170	4.9	Harlingen (South), Texas	Texas, A&M, Colorado, Nebraska



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On July 2, the Lincoln and Omaha newspapers reported that Nebraska had its first football recruit for 1997. Kyle Vanden Bosch, a 6-foot-3, 235-pound athlete at West Lyon High School in Inwood, Iowa, had made an oral commitment to accept a scholarship from the Cornhuskers, the papers said.

Jeff Cannon

On July 3, they reported that Bobby Newcombe, a much-publicized quarterback at Highland High School in Albuquerque, N.M., had stopped in Lincoln with his dad, on the drive home from a football camp at the University of Michigan, to tell Nebraska he had settled on the Cornhuskers.

On July 4, Kyle Kollmorgen, a 6-foot-4, 267-pound lineman at Lincoln Southeast High, added his name to Nebraska's recruiting list. He "saw the stories that those other two recruits committed," Kollmorgen told the *Lincoln Journal Star*. "And I wanted to be a part of it right away."

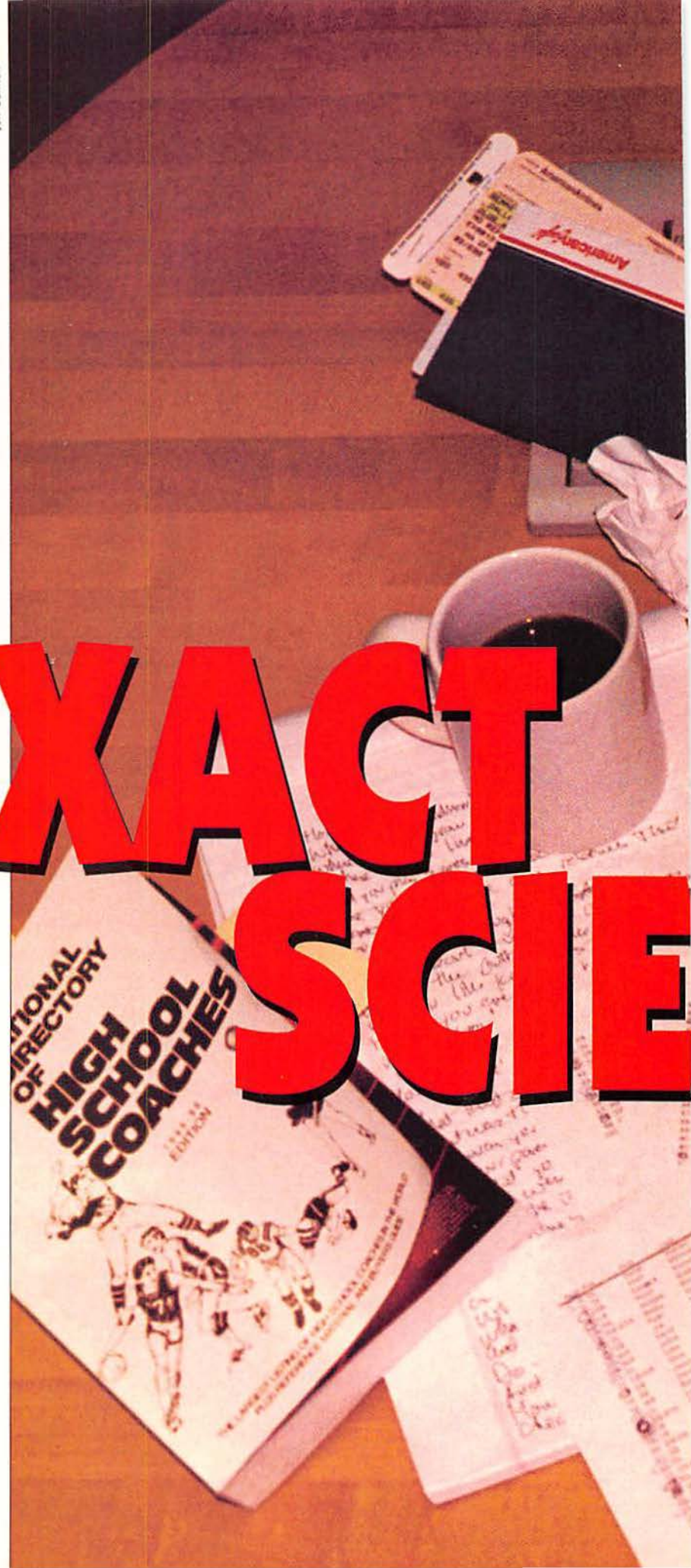
By the end of July, two more athletes

INEXACT SCIENCE

As following the recruiting race gets more popular, the actual job of recruiting continues to get more complicated

• by Mike Babcock

had made oral commitments to Nebraska, according to the newspapers: Lincoln Northeast's Irwin Swinney, who was projected to be a wide receiver, and (Omaha) Millard North's Eric Crouch, like Newcombe a nationally rated option quarterback.



NCE



Oral commitments are non-binding, of course. Nothing is official until letters of intent are signed, which can't happen until February 5, and Nebraska could not confirm, or deny, the newspaper reports. But the athletes apparently had given their word. The Cornhuskers were off to a good start.

The list of commitments didn't grow nearly as fast after July. Even so, Nebraska continued to get oral commitments. By the time the Cornhuskers packed their bags and headed to Miami to begin preparations for the Orange Bowl on Dec. 22, the list included 14 names, from places as diverse, geographically, as Honolulu, Hawaii, and Wahpeton, N.D.

Dominic Raiola, a 6-foot-3, 285-pound offensive lineman, would be Nebraska's first scholarship recruit from Hawaii. Glen Matthews, a 6-foot-4, 300-pound defensive tackle, was the first junior college player to make an oral commitment. Matthews, who is from Chicago, played at the North Dakota State College of Science in Wahpeton, after spending his freshman year at

All the hard work, preparation and living on the road pays off for Osborne and his staff when standouts such as Grant Wistrom sign with Nebraska.

Bob Berry



New Mexico.

The deluge of early commitments is reminiscent of two seasons ago, when Nebraska had all but completed its recruiting before Christmas. After the Cornhuskers' national championship victory against Miami in the Orange Bowl game, he just had to "drop by and say 'Hi'" to those who had made oral commitments, Osborne would say later. It was "just an unbelievably easy year."

On letter-of-intent signing day, Osborne said: "We had seven or eight commit without seeing our campus, which was unnerving for us. It was a bizarre year, a little bit

difficult to explain."

Last year, was different. Nebraska didn't have as many oral commitments before it left to play Florida in the Fiesta Bowl, and afterward it dropped out of contention for a handful of players in which it had been interested because they were intimidated by what they had seen in the Fiesta Bowl game.

"They just thought: 'Well, you're just a bunch of supermen out there,'" Osborne said.

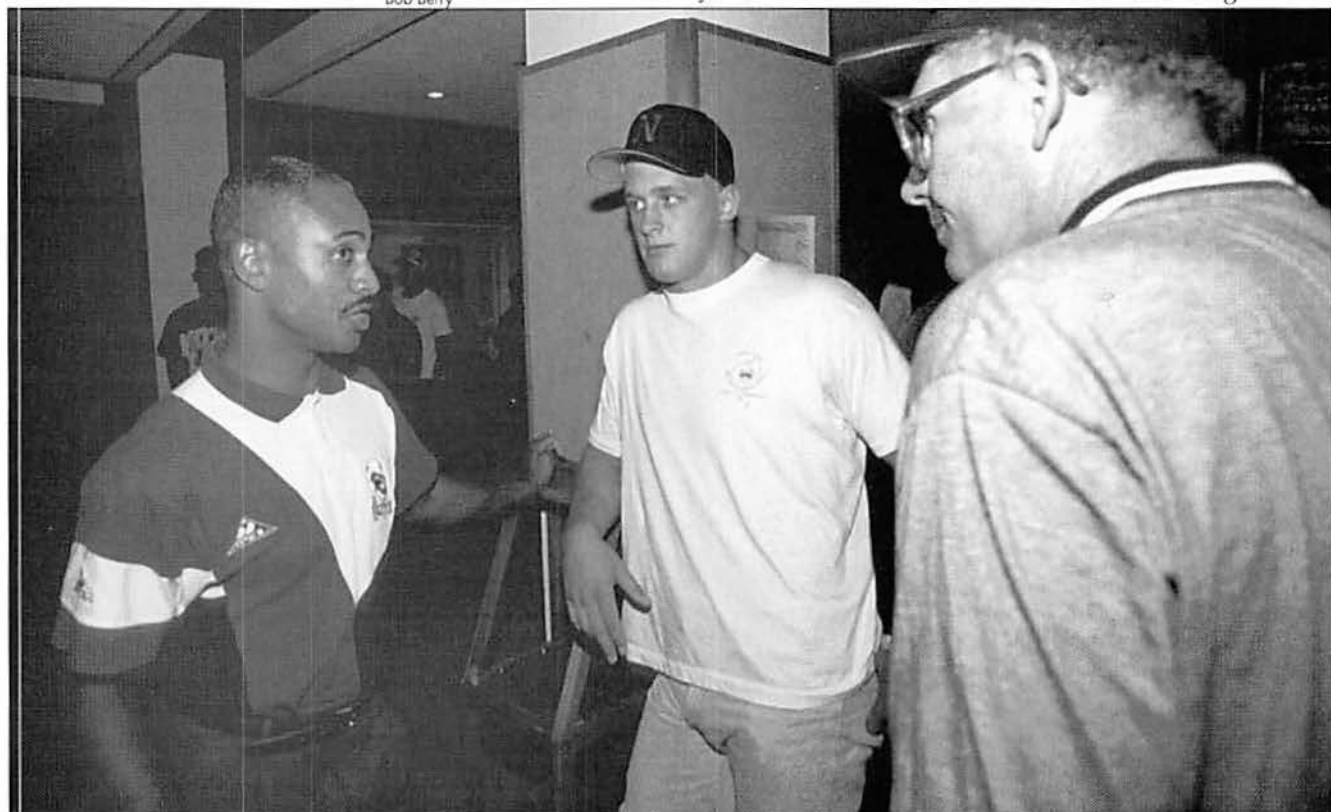
That the Cornhuskers didn't win a third national championship this season probably had no effect on their recruiting, not only because of the number of early commitments but also because "winning the national

championship isn't the major indicator of (recruiting) success," said Bobby Burton, who publishes the *National Recruiting Adviser* in Austin, Texas. "It isn't a cure-all."

Besides, Nebraska doesn't have recruiting problems to cure "It's: Which comes first, the chicken or the egg? Nebraska got the kids first, then they won the national championships," Burton said.

"Success starts with evaluating recruits and getting out on the road."

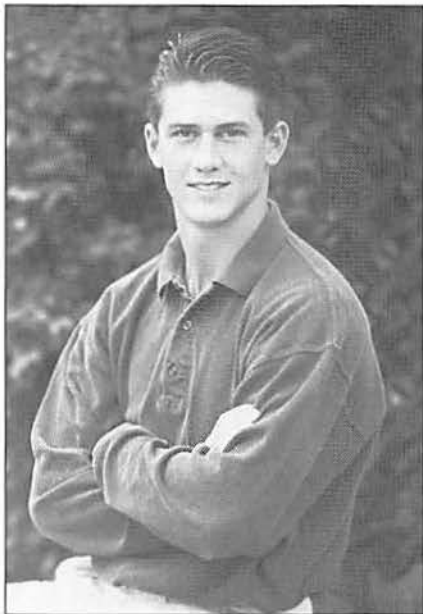
Nebraska appears to be putting together another outstanding recruiting class, according to Burton. The Cornhuskers' recruiting is diffi-



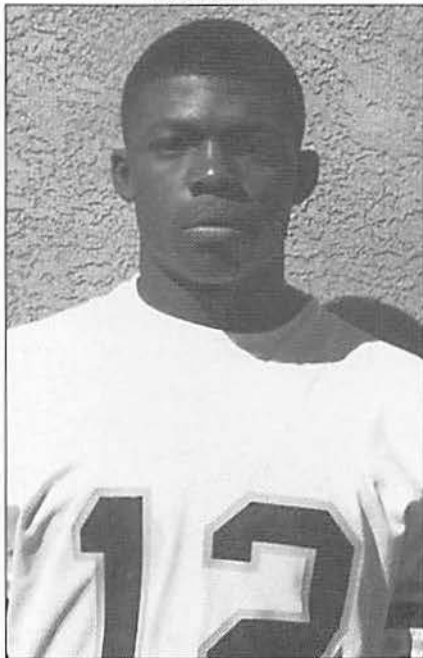
cult to evaluate, he said, because they go in so many directions to find players who fill their specific needs. Raiola and Matthews are dramatic examples of that.

Quarterback is among Nebraska's recruiting priorities this year. Clint Finley, the only quarterback in last year's class of scholarship recruits, has been moved to the secondary. The commitments from Crouch and Newcombe in July "were huge," said Burton. "That was a primary need they filled."

Burton said the Cornhuskers should survive the departure of



Landing early verbals from Eric Crouch (top) and Bobby Newcombe (bottom) — two of the top quarterbacks in the nation — was huge for Nebraska.



Steve Pederson, who left his position as associate athletic director for football operations to become athletic director at Pittsburgh.

Osborne named Pat Logsdon, Pederson's assistant with 17 years of experience in the football offices, as his replacement on a temporary basis. She is coordinating on-campus recruiting visits.

Even though Pederson "was one of the most well-organized recruiting directors in the country, Tom Osborne has a history of replacing good people with other good people," Burton said. "Those things happen everywhere. You're going to lose good people. You're going to lose an assistant coach. The problem arises when a program loses a number of good people, all at the same

time."

Nebraska also lost assistant coach Tony Samuel (see below) to New Mexico State, where he will be the head coach. "We'll pick up his recruiting areas among the staff we have," said Osborne.

With oral commitments for about three-fourths of the scholarships they're likely to give this year, the Cornhuskers can now turn their attention to a "few key and quality players" to round out their recruiting, according to Burton. Two years ago, the last player to decide was I-back Ahman Green. Last year, Nebraska's final recruit was cornerback Ralph Brown. Some players are worth waiting for.

"You know what Ralph Brown did," Burton said. ■



Tony Samuel Takes New Mexico State Job

LEAVING THE NEST

Tony Samuel, who had been an assistant on coach Tom Osborne's staff since 1986, is now the head football coach at New Mexico State. Samuel was hired in December to replace Jim Hess, but he remained with Nebraska through the Orange Bowl game before beginning his new job.

The 41-year-old Samuel, who also played at Nebraska, was among a reported 150 applicants for the job, which opened after Hess was fired following seasons of 2-9 and 1-10.

"He'll be a good head coach. I wish him well," Osborne said.

Samuel's staff has a heavy Cornhusker emphasis. Among the assistants he hired were former Nebraska players Jeff Jamrog, Gerry Gdowski, Steve Stanard and Barney Cotton.

He also hired Clayton Carlin, who had been a Cornhusker grad assistant.

The last time an Osborne assistant left Nebraska to become a head coach was nearly 20 years ago, when Jerry Moore went to North Texas after the 1978 season.

At press time, Osborne had not named a replacement for Samuel.

Frank Solich, Cornhusker assistant head coach and running backs coach, was a finalist for the head coaching job at Minnesota, which was filled in December by Kansas coach Glen Mason. ■

To our readers: To complement our detailed look at the college recruiting process, we asked Lee Caryer, author of *The Recruiting Struggle*, to tell us about recruiting from the athlete's point of view. The following collection of stories in his new book illustrates the range of skill levels, media expectations, educational priorities and other considerations which college coaches face as they build their teams.

Casualties Of War

Ken Hall is proof that sometimes even the greatest "can't miss talents" in each recruiting battle sometimes can (for a number of reasons)

IF THERE was ever an athlete who deserved to be confident of success in college sports it was Ken Hall, possibly the greatest high school football player who ever lived.

Following three successful seasons at Sugar Land, Texas, Hall finished his senior season setting the nation's single season rushing record after amassing 4,045 yards in 12 games. He set these marks despite frequently playing little in the second half.

It was a good enough mark to last until this season when Travis Henry, out of Frostproof, Fla., broke the record with 4,087 yards in 14 games.

Including rushing, total offense and scoring marks, his name appears in the records more often than any football player. Ken Hall may not be the best high school player of all time, but no one has better credentials.

After a brilliant high school career, Hall went through a recruitment process as intense as anyone today. Why not? He was a "sure-thing." From tens of thousands of letters, and about 250 offers, he decided on Texas A&M over Rice, Notre Dame and Texas.

The new Aggie coach had just arrived at A&M from Kentucky, where he never learned to co-exist with Wildcat basketball coach Adolph Rupp. That coach, Paul "Bear" Bryant, was ready to cast his

own shadow. When several recruits were introduced to an overflow crowd of A&M boosters, Hall received a standing ovation. It was almost as if he were a messiah. Bryant said, "I'm damned happy to hear Kenneth Hall is coming to A&M. I hope he goes out for football." The boosters roared, Hall blushed, and Bryant made clear who the messiah was at Texas A&M.

In 1954, freshmen were not eligible to play varsity ball, so Hall and his classmates played in a Southwest Conference freshman league. He

was moved from tailback to fullback. The tailback was John David Crow, who won the Heisman Trophy his senior year and was eventually inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Sophomore year "everything changed," Hall remembers. "I learned about the word 'more'. On the varsity there were more players, more competition, they had more weight, there were more plays, the offense was more sophisticated, there were more classes, more pressure and more strangers. I wasn't around friends I had known all my life, but people on a mission. A player has to have his priorities, or someone will take his place. Coaches don't care, because they have their priorities, their job to do. It's like that any time you move up a level in athletics or school or business, and that's when I learned it. Bear Bryant knew what he wanted to do. He was going to win, and nothing was going to stop him."

Today, of course, athletes learn about "more" as freshmen.

Hall practiced hard but never earned a starting assignment. After his junior year he quit the team. "I had come to school hoping to be a three time All-American like Doak Walker (at SMU) but it wasn't to be. It was a disappointment," he recalls today.

The difficulty of translating high school success to college glory con-



Playing behind John David Crow, Kenneth Hall (with ball) never got a chance to show the skills that made him such a hot commodity on the prep level.

tinues. Of the 73 first-team college All-Americans selected by the Associated Press in 1993-95, only 12 had been either first — or second — team All-USA choices by *USA Today*.

Unable to transfer under the rules of the time, Hall couldn't play in the NFL until his college class graduated. He played in the Canadian Football League and missed Rookie of the Year by one vote.

In the next four years, injuries and three different Heisman Trophy winners kept him from playing as much as he wanted. He retired from the AFL in 1961.

John David Crow said, "Lord knows I love Coach Bryant to death but I'll say this, if Kenneth Hall had gone to play under someone like Bud Wilkinson at Oklahoma, the world never would have heard of John David Crow."

Ken Hall is living proof that things don't always go well.

Often the most successful do not have the "required" size or 40-speed, like the 6-foot-5, 190-pound defensive lineman in Louisiana a Nebraska assistant coach found making plays all over the field.

"The coaches thought he could be a 'difference maker' in college, but the other major schools were not recruiting him," recalls Pitt Athletic Director Steve Pederson, then a Nebraska assistant. "We took a lot of local criticism for signing Neil Smith, who went on to make All-America for us. He was second pick in the NFL draft after the 1988 season and now is a Pro Bowl defensive lineman at about 285 pounds. But I have to say, for coaches and fans alike, it is very hard to gauge the growth and development of a 17-year-old football player, or his desire to play."

"Recruiting is a struggle," said Archie Griffin, the only football player to win two Heisman Trophies and now Associate Athletic Director at his alma mater, Ohio State University. "It's a struggle for the university to know the student-athlete, it's a struggle for the student-athlete to know the university."

Griffin said that the athlete has to be pro-active and goal oriented. Some are able to do so. Those who can not often sign with the best salesman. ■

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ESPN's Mike Gottfried Offers Detached Recruiting Perspective

ANALYST ANSWERS

As a player at Morehead State, an assistant at several schools and head coach at Murray State, Cincinnati, Kansas and Pittsburgh, Mike Gottfried has an extensive knowledge of football recruiting over the last three decades. The ESPN analyst has a detached perspective to offer.

"What happens to kids in recruiting is they get over-powered," Gottfried said. "People start calling, and it's nice to be wanted. Pretty soon there are so many calls the players don't know who they are talking to. Some enjoy the process so much they go down to the wire, and they sign with the last coach to talk with them."

To make the best choice, athletes have to take charge of the process.

"They should start thinking about college their sophomore year in high school, though it is difficult to know how good they are that early," Gottfried said. "They need to ask a lot of questions, and not just on their official visit. Then everybody puts their best foot forward, and time goes by too quickly to get all the information you need. Unofficial visits are a good idea. If distance is a problem, write letters to players and schools. Get information any way you can. On an official visit they'll put you in a nice hotel, feed you better food. I always thought the kids should ask to stay in a dorm, and eat cafeteria food, but I never had a player do that."

"Some of the rule changes have hurt recruiting by limiting their exposure to the coaches. Back in 1984-85, big name coaches called me at Pittsburgh, very excited about their chances to pass rules to keep the head coach on campus more. I didn't like it, because they had established reputations and I had to sell myself. Also, kids are more likely to make a bad choice if they don't know the coach well."

The ex-coach also cites the reduction in scholarships as a mistake.

"I think 85 football scholarships is too few. This year (1995) is the first year I saw the quality of college football go down from the previous year. I think 95 is about the right number. The players aren't professionals. They lose interest or transfer or get hurt. There are no trades."

In giving guidance to players, Gottfried said, "Don't get caught up in the name of the school. After the press conference and the party, you have got to go there and live with the decision. Don't let someone else decide for you."

"When you ask questions, carry a notebook and write down the answers. It gets confusing, and hard to remember who said what. Coaches select the best kids to host recruits, so make a point to talk to other players as well. And talk to them one-on-one, not in a group where they might be very careful what they say. Also, remember that not everyone will tell you the truth. A guy at your position may not want you to come. The best source of information is the head coach, but you have to bear down on them. You also have to try to figure out his standing at the school. Is he likely to get fired, or leave for a better job?"

Gottfried had one final word for the player who doesn't get a scholarship, but is encouraged to walk-on and try to earn one.

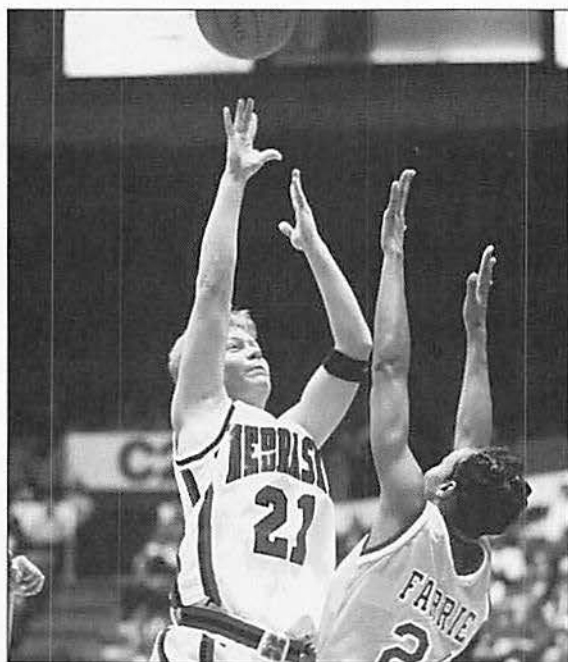
"Watch out. That is really tough. Once you are labeled a walk-on, you may stay there forever. Schools are usually tight on scholarships, so they hate to use one when they have the player already. If a coach makes a promise of a future scholarship, ask for something in writing. Tell him, 'It's for Mom and Dad to see.' Then you'll know how real the offer is." ■

— Lee Caryl



Gottfried would like to see college football scholarship limits raised to 95.

YOUTH GONE WILD



Angela Beck's squad jumped out to a school record setting mark of 9-0 behind the play of Brooke Schwartz and her freshman class

At the risk of overstating, the victory was "huge," Angela Beck said. Beck, in her 11th season as the Nebraska women's basketball coach, was referring to the Huskers' come-from-behind, 73-67 victory against Iowa at Kailua-Kona, Hawaii, in early December.

Iowa, a perennial power, was ranked ninth at the time. "No matter how good Iowa is . . . that's yet to be seen . . . but we beat them when they were considered very good," Beck said.

"The Iowa game, I think, let us know we could play with anybody in the country."

The victory was Nebraska's sev-

enth without a loss in a record-setting start. Prior to a holiday break, the Huskers were 9-0 as they prepared to open Big 12 play against Colorado at Lincoln on Jan. 4.

Beck was hoping the Iowa victory would give her young team confidence, in much the same way an early-season victory at nationally ranked Duke helped boost the Nebraska women's soccer team.

"We talked before the game that

it wasn't going to be the greatest in our history, and I don't think we approached it that way," Beck said. "I think they were happy they beat Iowa. They felt satisfied with that. But actually, the young players, they were never giddy (about winning). I don't necessarily think our upper-

classmen were. They weren't giddy, either. But I think our upperclassmen felt more pressure to win the game than the young players did.

"The thing that's amazing to me is, a lot of the young kids profess that they never ever felt we were going to lose . . . I can't say that was my feeling necessarily."

The Huskers are a good mix of veterans and newcomers. During the non-conference season, Beck went with a set starting lineup that included seniors Tina McClain and LaToya

**ALL
SPORTS**

Jon Waller



Doage, juniors Anna DeForge and Emily Thompson and freshman Nicole Kubik. But the team's character has been heavily influenced by an enthusiastic freshman class described by Beck as "the most talented we've ever had."

Kubik, a 5-foot-10 guard, is the most notable of the freshmen. She came from Cambridge, Neb., to join her sister Jami, a Husker junior. Nicole finished her high school career as the second-leading scorer in Nebraska prep history, with 2,179

points. She led Cambridge to three state championships.

"We offered her a scholarship her sophomore year. That's how good we knew she'd be," Beck said.

Cambridge High had an 81-game winning streak during Kubik's four seasons.

Charlie Rogers, another of Beck's prize freshmen, led South Sioux City, Neb., High School to victories in its final 41 games and back-to-back state championships. Like Kubik, the 6-foot-2 Rogers was a

four-year starter, who received All-America honorable mention from *Street & Smith* as a senior.

Brooke Schwartz finished her career at Gering, Neb., High School as the state's seventh-highest scorer, with 1,894 points. She has played with a maturity that belies her youth.

The 5-foot-11 Schwartz made four of Nebraska's eight free throws in the final minute of the victory against Iowa. She was encouraged to pass the ball to DeForge, who is among the team's best free throw shooters, late in the game, said Beck. "But she wanted to keep it because she wanted to prove she was worthy of being on this team. That's a pretty heavy-duty thing for a young player."

DeForge and McClain are the returning starters from last season's NCAA Tournament team. Doage, who's in her second season at Nebraska after transferring from Lincoln, Ill., Junior College, has taken over as the point guard. And, at 6-foot-3, Thompson provides height inside.

Thompson is finally healthy, after being hampered by knee problems.

"We really don't have any super-stars," Beck said. "I think the teams we've had in the past that have been quality teams . . . we've had the Big Eight Player of the Year or a first-team All-Big Eighter. Right now, I don't see that. I think we have some very, very good players. We have a lot of balance."

The fast start caused Beck to adjust her goals for this team. "But we're still young enough that I'm not certain how long we can sustain what's been occurring," she said before Big 12 play began.

Even so, "the maturity level of our players is pretty good as far as their attitude about winning."

The success of the women's soccer and volleyball teams has been contagious. The interaction with players from those teams has benefited her basketball team, said Beck. "They see those kids every day, and they room with a lot of those kids, so they see, maybe, what it takes to get there."

Beck has tried to restrain her enthusiasm for the young players who set the tone early in the season. She told Schwartz one day that she wasn't going to be profuse in her praise of the freshmen.

"I know what you're doing," Schwartz replied. "You're trying to bring us along (slowly)."



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Still, the newcomers don't lack a sense of direction. "They kind of know where they're going," Beck said. "Actually, a few of the freshmen could be playing more minutes than they are."

"I'm just trying to give the upper-classmen the opportunity to prove themselves."

Beck hasn't hesitated to use the freshmen, however. In fact, she has felt "highly comfortable" when Nicole Kubik, Schwartz and Rogers have been in the game at the same time.

"I didn't know that I'd ever feel that way," she said. "That's kind of unusual."

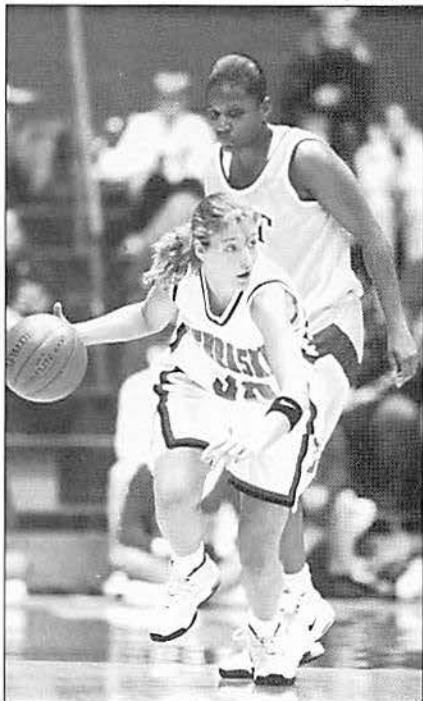
But then, these freshmen are unusual. "Their confidence is breeding our success, and breeding a new generation of attitude. They have the belief that they want to be a Top 10 team," said Beck.

Such a goal might be a little unrealistic right now. But, as the Iowa victory showed, it's not as far-fetched as it once was. Nebraska has the potential. The key now is consistency.

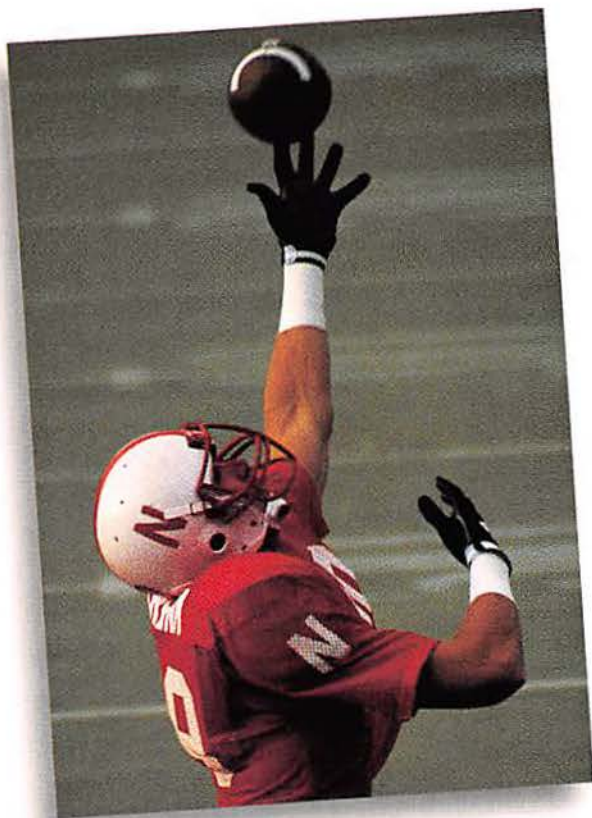
Championship programs "win a lot of the little ones that you're expected to win," Beck said. "We've really tried to focus on that. I think with this new attitude and the way the young players feel, I don't think they're going to settle for losing a game they're expected to win." ■

Junior forward Anna DeForge has been a steady force as the young Huskers work on their chemistry.

Jon Waller



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